

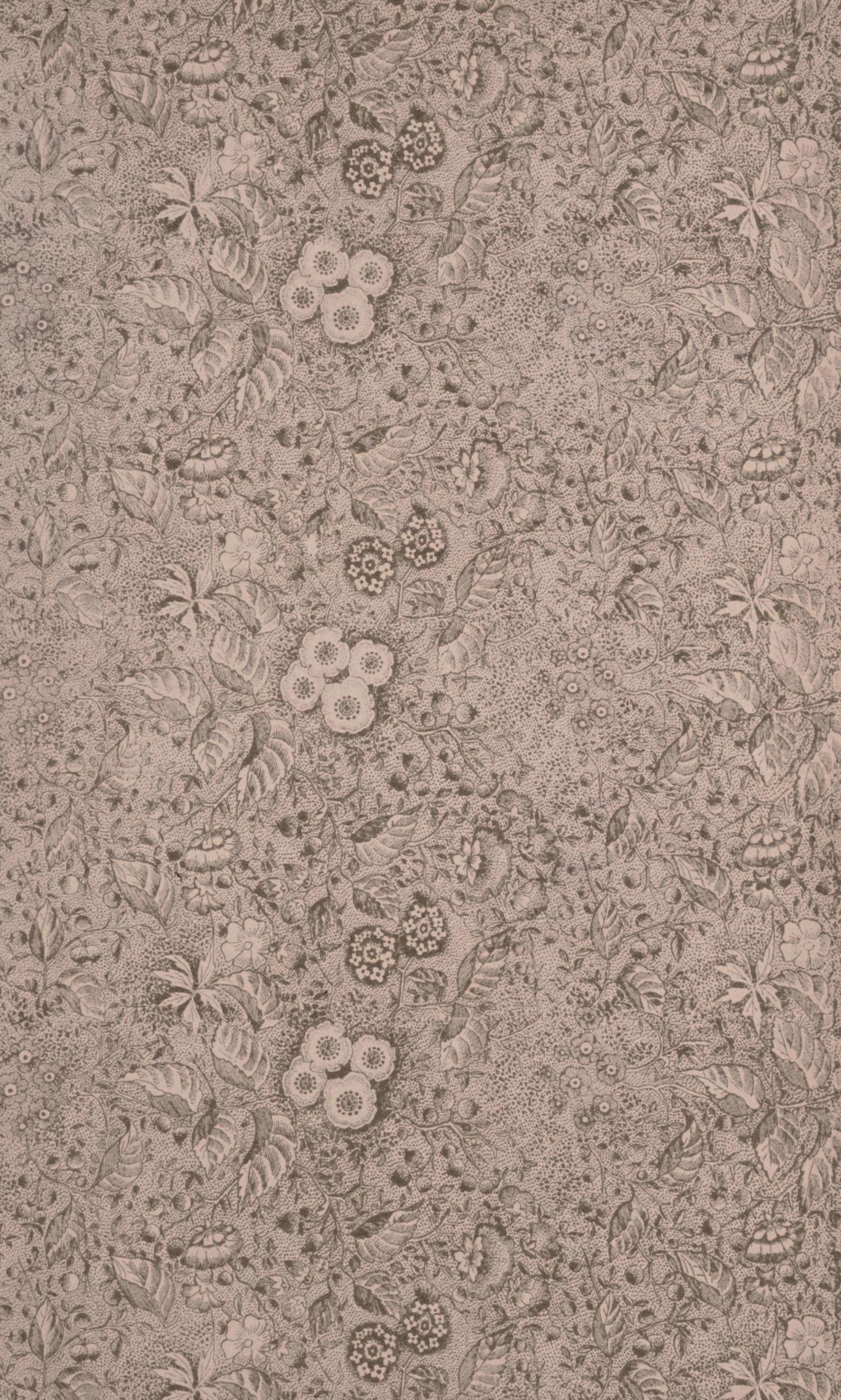
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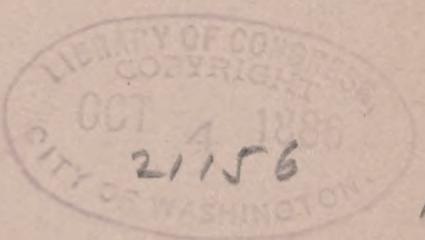
A NOVEL.

BY ✓
SYDNEY J. WILSON.

Memphis, Tenn.

35

Like an Æolian harp, the human soul
Responds each breath that plays along the string;
And as 'tis placed, and as the currents roll,
So does the music on the breezes ring.



PRESS OF
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY,
PHILADELPHIA.

1886.

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PREFACE.

MEMPHIS, August 3, 1886.

DR. S. A. ROGERS:

DEAR SIR,—The South is disencumbering herself of the ideas and customs that hitherto have burdened her steps, and is now moving rapidly out into the broad paths of progress. This movement, while not altogether, is, to a great extent, due to the young generation,—the young men whose youth shielded them from the resistless blows that broke the spirit of their elders, and who now stand prepared to guide their country to the lofty eminence it is destined to attain. That belief, my dear doctor, explains why in seeking a name to which to dedicate this work I select yours from among the many other eminent names that add lustre to this, one of the foremost cities of the South. I find you at twenty-one years of age firmly abreast with the times, one of the first in your profession, and eminently fitted in every way to adorn your high position; so the spirit that enables me to appreciate intrinsic worth

whenever discovered prompts me to show thus my admiration of you.

It is useless to weary the reader by paraphrasing this work, as I trust its pages lucidly convey their lesson; but allow me to say, as I portrayed the development of mind, and as I was fearful of carrying the analysis beyond the reader's patience, he may charge me with being too concise where I should have been more diffuse,—if so, let him but remember that the mind can girdle the world in a moment with its presence, and I feel assured he will withdraw the charge and follow out the train of thought there suggested.

With the wish that this work were more worthy your consideration, and the hope that the future may witness the full fruition of all that your present promises, I am your sincere friend,

THE AUTHOR.

STANLEY HUNTINGDON.

CHAPTER I.

DOUBTLESS the reader is familiar with descriptions of Southern homes. The very name suggests breezy verandas, green lawns, and magnolia groves ; so, without further detail, we will enter such a home, uninvited guests, to witness the fun and frolic that invariably succeed the old-fashioned country wedding. Passing through a wide park-gate and following the broad sweep of the gravelled drive, we discover a low, rambling brick house ablaze with light from parlor to kitchen. This is the home of the Huntingdons ; and it is every way worthy the proud, passionate race which has trod its halls since before the red man yielded his heritage to the encroaching pale-face,—the heritage which now comprises the fairest portion of Northwest Mississippi.

The family, at the time of which I write, con-

sisted of the widow Huntingdon and her two sons, Archie and Stanley. And as Archie, the elder, had at ten o'clock that morning sworn to love and cherish the daughter of a neighboring planter, we wish, as we have intimated before, to be present at the succeeding festivities.

Alighting at the yard-gate, we catch the soft sheen of trailing skirts in the capricious moonlight, and hear the music of gay young voices ringing out on either hand from beneath the dark old forest giants, that seem to wag their solemn heads in sage disapproval of the unexpected sounds. Reaching the wide portico, whose gleaming white shafts are surrounded by young couples, whispering their sweet nothings in the friendly shadows, and ascending the pillared steps, we enter the brightly-illuminated parlors, where a string band fills the rooms with its ravishing strains, as the lancers, old Virginia reels, polkas, and waltzes follow each other in rapid succession. Then, following the throng, we find the long dining-hall, and watch, with something akin to envy, the bright young faces ranging around the heavily-laden tables. Meats, pies, puddings, tarts, custards, candies, cakes, oranges, etc., disappeared on the magic wings of the fortitude engendered by non-dyspeptic stomachs. Ye gods! "Once more who

would not be a boy ?" and girl also, the noble author should have added.

But let us note that interesting young couple ; which, having finished the repast, seems to have important business upon the now deserted portico.

One is a slender youth seemingly about nineteen years of age ; and, although *unformed* is written in unmistakable characters all over him, there is a singular charm in the frank young face. But, as we note the small hands, the high-arched feet, the quick turn of the noble head, and the lazy fire slumbering in the large gray eyes, we wish him safe across the threshold into settled manhood.

His companion, a saucy-lipped, dimpled-cheeked, brown-eyed girl, not more than twelve months younger than himself, is skilfully parrying his whimsical badinage as they promenade to and fro.

Nearing the southern limit of the portico, they unconsciously pause and watch the weird beauty of the scene. The moon rides high and bright in the heavens ; but broken clouds, rapidly drifting northward across its face, cause light and shadow alternately to chase each other along the sombre park ; while the wind, rushing through the tossing branches of the mighty oaks, sighs and moans as if lamenting the lost ones of earth.

As the girl glanced down the dark avenue of oaks, and heard the mournful dirge of the wind, she shivered slightly and drew nearer to her companion.

“You seem nervous to-night,” the youth said, noticing the action.

“This scene fills me with awe,” she replied. “You who have been reared among these grand old trees cannot imagine how it affects less fortunate mortals.”

“I am glad you like it,” he said, bending nearer.

“Like it!” she began, then, catching his meaning look, she stammered, blushed, and hung her pretty head.

“Lena,” he said, a soft smile flitting across his lips, “I coaxed you out here for a purpose; and I believe from the blushes dying those cheeks you have divined my business. I wish to speak of a subject fraught with interest to me; and, I trust, to yourself also. It is useless to speak of my love for you, and to ask, ‘Do you love me in return?’ as our eyes have betrayed us long ago; but, as you know, in a few days my brother takes his bride away, leaving my mother and myself alone in this large house; so, what more opportune time could we choose to consummate our happiness? Look up,

little one, and name the day that will give me the right to transplant you to these ancient oaks."

"As you have taken my love for granted," she answered, with a saucy pout, "you had now better name the day yourself, and order me to be ready."

"I will obey your injunction," he said, with mock gravity. "Let me see; I can dispose of my crops in two months, and in that length of time you can easily complete your arrangements for making yourself too sweet for my peace of mind; so we will say two months from to-night, this being the 10th. You do not reply, little sweetheart. Did I place the time too far away? if so, I will stretch a point and—"

"Too far away, indeed!" she cried, with burning cheeks. "Your self-assurance is really awe-inspiring. But I have a great mind to punish your impudence by putting the hour twelve months from to-night."

"However lamentable it is to spoil a 'great mind,'" he said, with a light laugh, as he drew her into the shadow of a column, "that one must be sacrificed. Accept this ring, my little darling," he continued, bending softly over her, "and let me seal our compact on those saucy lips. Ah! It requires a dozen to make the trade binding. Be still,

will you? The music has commenced again," he said, after binding the "trade" to his own satisfaction. "Shall we join the dancers?"

"I am happy here," she whispered, shyly, as she slipped her little hand into his.

But we will leave the foolish children to their roseate dreams; they are feeling what thousands have felt before, and, alas! like them, will awake to the realization that life affords but few such moments.

CHAPTER II.

THE Sabbath following the incidents narrated in the preceding chapter dawned as only a Southern October day can. Indian summer threw its hazy mantle over field and forest, and all nature seemed in dreamland. Even the usually shrill notes of the partridge, and the rat, tat, tat of the woodpecker sounded subdued, as if to accord with the slumbering quiet that reigned supreme.

Our two lovers, Stanley Huntingdon and Lena Redmond, whose acquaintance we made a few nights since, seated in a light buggy, drove from the Hunt-

ingdon gates and turned westward along a shady road. I am constrained to acknowledge that all parties interested in this young couple supposed that Stanley was taking Lena to her home in B—, where they, like all dutiful children, would attend Sunday-school and church ; but, detecting a guilty look upon their faces as Dame Huntingdon cautioned them about remembering the minister's text, I determined to follow, and discover upon what mischief they were intent. So there they go, the dappled ponies lazily trotting in exactly an opposite direction from Lena's home ; while they—well, they are swapping tender looks, as lovers will, and planning a muscadine hunt ; as if the park at home was not black with that luscious fruit !

After travelling for an hour or more through a wild, wooded district, an unusual sound came floating to them on the morning breeze ; and listening intently a few moments, Stanley exclaimed,—

“Our lucky star is in the ascendency ; for, if I mistake not, we are nearing a Methodist open-air meeting.”

His surmises proved correct ; for as they proceeded the sounds increased in volume, until a sharp turn of the road revealed a picturesque scene. Upon a small board platform stood an aged divine, while

grouped around him in every conceivable attitude were two hundred or more, men, women, and children, all engaged in singing that soul-stirring hymn, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks."

The lovers had rebelled against the idea of being cooped within the four walls of a church and of listening to a play of rhetoric, while all the outside world was filled with love and sunshine; but here, where they could use the buggy for a pew and the whole world for a meeting-house, it was altogether different; and driving up as close as was practicable, they listened attentively while the good man painted in glowing terms what an undesirable location is the sinner's hell.

When the picture had been painted, the good brothers and sisters had indulged in their Sunday shout, the doxology had been sung, and the benediction had been pronounced, the congregation began to disperse, bestowing many a broad stare upon the young lovers who had dropped so unceremoniously into their midst.

With the characteristic hospitality of the unsuspecting Southerner, so many of the elder members surrounded the buggy, urging Stanley and Lena to share their "con" bread at dinner, that the lovers were in something of a dilemma as to whose invita-

tion to accept until the superior claims of the worthy deacon overrode the rest.

To Stanley and Lena, at least, that dinner seemed a fit meal for the gods. Never before had corn bread seemed so palatable, milk so cool, butter so fresh, or a potato-pie so rich and juicy ; and, it is to be feared, they somewhat shocked their worthy host with their merriment upon a day set apart—by him—for long faces, Bible reading, and perhaps a few long-metre hymns if he felt unusually festive. Finishing the simple meal, the lovers took possession of the funereal-looking parlor ; and, opening the antiquated and asthmatic organ, Lena drew from it strains that filled the gaping rustics with unsabbatical ecstasy. Then becoming muscadine hungry, they seized their hats, and under cover of the good deacon's after-dinner nap, stole away to the silent woods.

My bosom thrills with rapture as I feel the upward sweep of my race, and my spirit leaps awake with ecstasy while dreaming of its theurgic future ; but to feel the swelling of the pure, primeval soul within my bosom that God breathed into the nostrils of our first Parent, place me amid the solitudes where nature reigns supreme. And as I gaze upon that innocent young couple strolling joyously through

the quiet shadows of this sylvan forest, and note their eyes beaming with the love and happiness of uncorrupted hearts, I am almost overwhelmed with a superstitious reverence for nature's subtle, mysterious, and all-pervading power. For as straws show in which direction the wind blows, I watch the squirrels that would break their necks in frantic endeavors to escape the hunter's sight, whisk their bushy tails, and bark boldly at the young lovers, see the timid hares hop shyly around them, while the forest songsters warble their rarest notes, and it arouses a train of metaphysical and psychological thoughts that roll off, unsatisfied, into illimitable space.

Discovering a heavily-laden muscadine vine, Stanley swung himself to the top, and under his vigorous arm it was soon literally hailing its luscious fruit. Descending by the time Lena had filled their hats, they then withdrew to a shady bank and "fell to" with a will; but, as their hearts were too light to continue long at such an unromantic business, they quickly passed from eating to pelting each other with the pulpy balls. Then Stanley concluded to punish her for staining his "Sunday suit" by kissing her for each time she had hit him. She objected on the ground that he had hit her equally

as often. He, of course, was willing to submit to the same punishment, and, on her continuing to refuse, a squabble arose, and bad blood was only prevented by a compromise.

After collecting the compromise, Stanley clasped his hands behind his head, and, leaning back against the bank, said, slowly,—

“The wind is asleep in the branches, the quail are asleep in the brake, and my heart is drowsy with bliss,—the natural effect of your sugary lips; so sing me a song, little one, while Mother Nature takes her siesta.”

She had formed a gaudy cap by pinning the frost-tinted leaves together; and, placing this upon her clustering curls, she began in pure, bird-like tones the following pathetic lines :

“A hundred months have passed, Lorena,
Since last I held that hand in mine,
And felt the pulse beat fast, Lorena,
Tho’ mine beat faster far than thine.
A hundred months,—’twas flowery May,
When up the hilly slope we climbed,
To watch the dying of the day,
And hear the distant church-bells chime.

“We loved each other then, Lorena,
More than we ever dared to tell;

And what we might have been, Lorena,
 Had but our lovings prospered well—
 But then, 'tis past,—the years are gone,
 I'll not call up their shadowy forms ;
 I'll say to them, 'Lost years, sleep on,
 Sleep on, nor heed life's pelting storms.'

" It matters little now, Lorena,
 The past—is in the eternal past :
 Our heads will soon lie low, Lorena,
 Life's tide is ebbing out so fast.
 There is a future, oh, thank God !
 Of life this is so small a part ;
 'Tis dust to dust beneath the sod,
 But there, up there, 'tis heart to heart."

When the last note died away in distant echoes,
 Stanley turned gravely to her and said,—

" You are surely sad to-day, Lena, as you choose
 those sorrowful words."

" No," she answered, dreamily ; " but that song
 holds a weird fascination for me ; it is filled with
 such pathos, such tender regrets ; each word seems
 a heart-throb. He who penned the lines surely
 lived their history."

" What if its sentiment, some day, became a
 reality to us, Lena ?"

" Hush," she answered, gently placing her hand

over his lips. "If it did, I would wish to go, 'there, up there, where 'tis heart to heart.'"

Raising his hand, he toyed with her dimpled cheek and clustering ringlets, as he murmured, "We love each other now, my Lena. More than our feeble tongues can tell.

"This is a grand old world, a glorious lot," he continued, as she smoothed the locks from his brow and placed a cap of flaming leaves on his head. "With our loved ones by our side we tread its bright paths till we reach the grave together; we are, then, reunited forever, somewhere beyond that softly-beaming arch. Who could, ah! who could be a misanthrope while contemplating the love and beauty around him, and dreaming of the unimaginable joy in store for him up there?"

Ah! dream on, rustic philosopher; may no rude slap from that "grand old world" ever awaken you.

"Stanley," Lena said, shyly, touching his cheek as she rearranged his cap, "I would like to tell you something, but I fear you will be angry."

"Have I proven myself such a Turk that you are afraid to speak your mind?" he asked, with a smile.

"No, no," she answered, slowly; "but this is something serious,—something I dread to mention. Do you know Jasper Hewlitt?"

“Unfortunately, yes,” Stanley answered, a dark scowl sweeping across his brow. “And a more shameless libertine, a more abandoned scoundrel, never blotted this fair earth with his presence.”

He was looking up at the sunbeams glancing down through the overhanging foliage, and did not see the scared look of awful horror these bitter words brought to her eyes. But when he turned to her with the question, “What about Hewlitt?” on his lips, she threw out her hand as if warding off some blow and answered, irrelevantly,—

“I received a letter, yesterday, from brother Harry.”

“Did it contain ill news?”

“No. He wants me to pay him a visit before we—before you and I—before the 10th of December.”

“You inform the gentleman for me,” Stanley said, with an amused smile, “that the Arkansaw agues have rattled his none too generous quota of brains.”

“But, Stanley, remember——”

“Whew! this *is* getting serious, with a vengeance. Why, my dear child, your brother has two other sisters to fall back on, while I have only you; and to ask me to spare my all just now is out of the

question. Later on I may be only too happy to accommodate him with your society."

"But, Stanley, it is two months until—and I will only remain with him two weeks; so, I feel sure, when you think of the dear old boy struggling all alone in that sickly bottom to make us a living, you will spare me."

Lifting up his hands in tragic despair, Stanley exclaimed, "It no longer puzzles me that Herod was unable to refuse Herodias the head of John the Baptist, as I would yield up my own, did you plead for it with that pretty, pouting look of injured innocence. When do you wish to start?"

"About Thursday next, I suppose."

"Very well, I will accompany you to Memphis, and see you safe on board the boat."

"You are too good," she said, softly. "There! does that repay you for your sacrifice?"

"On the contrary," he grumbled, "it reminds me of all I will lose during those two weeks." He had risen; and, standing with his arm thrown across her shoulder, he looked earnestly down into the bright, smiling face, as he said, in a voice that trembled with an undercurrent of deep feeling,—

"Lena, when you spoke of leaving me for two weeks, my mind pictured a future robbed of your

presence; and what I saw there convinced me that if God took you from me, or if you proved false and unworthy, fate would stand my friend did it strike me dead with the news. That is, perhaps, a weak confession; but it is, nevertheless, a truthful one."

"What has happened, Stanley?" she asked, looking up with a frightened look on her sweet, childish face.

Not wishing to shadow the happy young face, Stanley left unuttered the passionate love and dark forebodings aroused by his rapid glance over future contingencies; and, forcing a smile to his lips, he answered, playfully,—

"Oh, nothing; I merely had an attack of the heroics, something that I am periodically troubled with; or, as the darkies would express it, 'A 'possum runned over my grave.' But we must return now, or the good deacon will imagine Elisha's bears are ably convincing us of our naughtiness. You see that elm standing ahead in the path. I will wager a pair of gloves I can reach it first. Now, one, two, three,—Go!"

Reassured by his merry mood, Lena sprang away, with a gay laugh, and on they flew like a couple of children loosed from school; he purposely stumbling

and falling so as to allow her time to reach the coveted goal, and was amply rewarded by watching her sparkling eyes as she clapped her little hands exultingly over the victory.

Then came their humble apologies to the good deacon for their misdemeanor; and, afterwards, the long drive homeward in the waning afternoon; the watching of the blood-red sunset, the counting of the stars as they woke one by one and twinkled merrily down upon them; the hoot of the solemn owl; the lonely cry of the whippoorwill; the driving up to a negro church to witness the religious bedlam inside; Stanley's attempts to collect "toll" at every bridge and crossway; his failure in those attempts from Lena's struggles and the antics of the frisky ponies; and then came the acme of sorrowful bliss reached during the lingering kisses and clinging embrace as they parted at the doorstep.

CHAPTER III.

As I dislike to describe a railroad journey, if possible, more than I dread to make one, I will leave untold the getting up before daylight, the muddy, scalding coffee, the haste to reach the depot, the intelligent answer of the railroad officials, the shrieking pandemonium greeting the conclusion, and land our young lovers safe in Memphis. There, they discover the day and night is before them, as the boat which is to carry Lena to her destination does not leave until the following morning.

Securing rooms at the Peabody Hotel, they made more elaborate toilets than their haste to catch the train would allow, and sallied forth to—the picture-gallery, of course. What countryman and his sweetheart ever visited the city without having their “beauties struck,” and generally struck together; he unmanneredly sitting down, while she stands dutifully by his side, with her hand resting lovingly upon his shoulder? After examining the negatives, which, in spite of Mr. Bingham’s “Excellent; superb!” seemed as if they were weeping over the

grave of their last friend, the lovers issued out and began admiring the brilliant display of the shop-windows ; he purchasing everything which attracted her fancy, until bundles multiplied so astonishingly that a small boy had to be called into service : thus they wandered along, serenely unconscious of everything save the music in their hearts and the roar of vehicles in their ears ; unconscious that brisk business men smiled and softened as they passed this handsome, guileless couple ; unconscious that clerks winked as they entered, much as to say, “Ah, here comes a rich country chap with his best girl !” and proceeded to charge them war prices for the goods.

When Stanley had purchased all they—and the boy—could conveniently carry, they returned to the hotel ; and procuring a carriage after dinner, they saw the city “on wheels.” Then came supper, and, afterwards, the theatre.

Through all the eventful after-years of his passion-tossed life, that night spent at the play remained indelibly stamped upon Stanley’s memory. Many a night, while pacing the lagging hours of darkness away, has he lived, minute by minute, those short, happy hours again, as his mind pictured the brilliantly-lighted building, the crash of music, the

faint perfume, the sparkling gems and rich costumes worn by his beautiful countrywomen. Ah ! how tender was the look which, leaving the contemplation of the regal beauties about him, sought the shy, brown eyes at his side; how he longed to fold her in his arms as the music thrilling through him touched sleeping chords in his bosom; how their hands met in sympathetic ecstasy as the lovers in the play uttered some tender or lofty sentiment; how the red lips trembled and the big tears welled up as she watched the lover's mimic sufferings; how there was a suspicious moisture in his own manly eyes as he witnessed the emotion of the gentle-hearted maiden; how his heart fiercely throbbed when, on parting for the night, Lena's round arms stole about his neck as she softly whispered, "How happy you have made me ! And, oh ! Stanley, should anything ever come between us, promise me you will act as did that noble lover in the play;" how sincere was the promise given as his kisses lingered on the willing lips; how his blood leaped with such riotous ecstasy through his veins that sleep was impossible; and how, with cigars innumerable, he spent the night pacing the carpeted floor, dreaming the dreams of youth and love!—all this and more, would rise before him in later years, stiffening the

writhing sneer on his lips as it dispersed his well-nursed sophisms in air.

The morning broke (as Southern mornings will break at times) serene, balmy, cloudless, and glorious ; and taking Lena aboard the boat, Stanley cautioned her to be careful of her health in that malarious district, and to write him three letters a week ; then, taking a hasty leave, he turned away. But on reaching the door he paused ; and, glancing back, he saw Lena standing with clasped hands looking after him, with that sleepy light in her soft brown eyes which a night of dissipation invariably gives to the uninitiated. Thus they looked, a moment, into each other's eyes, as if each was deciding to go with the other and defeat the coming separation ; but, after wavering a moment, he broke the spell by raising his hat and turning away.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEAT little envelope, with a prim little "Mr. S. T. Huntingdon" traced on its snowy face, followed Stanley to Mississippi; and, while reading the girlish effusion, his mind, mirroring the charming writer as she traced the lines, moved him with an almost irresistible impulse to answer the letter in person. But putting the temptation from him, he re-read the letter again; then, in answer, covered page after page with rustic eloquence. It was such a letter as any young and ardent lover would write; untainted with any of that caution which prompts one, after a few sharp lessons in life, to veil his fondest feelings from even the eyes of the present loved one.

Riding into town behind his cotton-wagons the next day, Stanley put his pony into a livery-stable, and was turning his steps towards the post-office when he met Susy Clenny, Lena's bosom friend.

"I am fortunate," he said, shaking hands with her. "I received a letter from Lena yesterday, and by way of postscript was a written power of attorney delegating to me the exquisite authority to

collect, for her, the kisses of all her absent friends; so as you are her David, I will now present my bill."

"No, no," Susy cried, stepping back in affected alarm. "If my fellow were to hear of my settling such bills with a whiskered collector, he would give me the frigid vibrate, or, translated into plain English, the cold shake."

"Jealous-hearted, eh? Then take my advice and shake him at once, or disobey my injunction and live to rue it when, during some convulsion of the green-eyed monster, he proceeds to bowstring you with the buggy lines."

The girl looked at Stanley's laughing face a moment; and, as a strange light leaped to her bright, black eyes, she said, in quick, tense tones,—

"I have that in my pocket which, did you see it, would rouse the monster in your own bosom."

"Try me," he laughingly rejoined, "and be edified by the marvellous spectacle of my nostrils twitching, my eyes turning green, and my fingers working convulsively as if throttling some exultant rival."

She did not respond to this laughing banter, but, pointing to the letter in his hand, said,—

"I presume that is a love-missive for Lena.

Take my advice and destroy it, for she is not worthy to receive it."

"That is rather a grim jest," he responded, impatiently.

"Do I look as if I were jesting?"

Looking a moment at her earnest face, Stanley's eyes lit up with contemptuous scorn, and turning aside, he answered,—

"No, you do not, and allow me to bid Lena's bosom friend good-morning."

"One moment, Mr. Huntingdon," Susy exclaimed, vehemently. "It is not my custom to speak without being able to sustain my words."

"Pray do not trouble yourself," he answered, coldly. "Lena is as far above your poor malice as I am above questioning her honor."

Stepping in front of him to arrest his departure, the girl said, in a low, rapid voice,—

"I have always been your friend, Stanley Huntingdon, and hate me as you will, I shall do you a good turn despite your fond folly. That silly chit, who wears your ring, is also engaged to Jasper Hewlitt, an abandoned libertine, as you well know. They are together now, billing and cooing, no doubt, at this very moment. Ah! how they will laugh over that very tropical letter of yours!"

“Death and furies!” Stanley exclaimed, quivering with passion. “You are a woman; but thank God you have a brother, and——”

“Listen, my poor moon-struck lad,” the girl interrupted, with pitying contempt. “Doubtless you disbelieve my assertion, confidante though I am of your inamorata; but when I hold the unmistakable proof under your very nose, I do not believe you are silly enough to turn away.”

There is nothing like contempt to shame down anger and put one on his mettle. When Susy’s cool, contemptuous tones entered Stanley’s ears, they ran like an arctic chill along his boiling veins, giving him complete mastery of himself.

With a cool bow, he took the proffered letter and deliberately read it to the end. It was a letter from Lena to “My darling Susy, my dear, dear confidante,” and it cruelly vindicated the truthfulness of that “dear confidante.” What Stanley suffered as he read the damning evidence of Lena’s unworthiness the keenly-watchful girl could not determine. He had completely mastered himself, and not a muscle quivered, as he slowly refolded the letter, placed it in the envelope, and handed it to her, saying,—

“Miss Clenny, I ask your pardon; and, although

this act of yours is contemptible to the lowest degree, I thank you from the depths of my soul. So, so, I am on the carpet again. Well, as the saying goes, I owe you one, and when you need my services, command them. But, for the present, good-morning."

There was, perhaps, an unusual lustre in Stanley's eyes as he proceeded to the platform, tearing up the letter he had written to Lena ; and, doubtless, his movements were more rapid than ordinary, but beyond that, there were no visible signs of the blow he had received. He sampled the cotton, sold it, carried the weights, price, etc., to the book-keeper, and received his money. Then, making a few trifling purchases, he gave his negroes money to get them "sumthin' waam," and mounting his pony, rode slowly homeward in the waning afternoon.

As a desert does not swallow the cleaving stream at once, but gradually absorbs the lessening volume as it rolls over each barren mile, so do the fresh feelings of youth waste away in their ceaseless rounds through an outraged bosom. Stanley had been reared on a large plantation in a sparsely-settled neighborhood, and having had few boy associates of his own color, the fiery and impetuous nature he inherited had been deepened, strengthened,

and intensified by its peculiar and isolated training. And having been surrounded since childhood with negroes, who fawned upon him as only a negro can, he had caught that unconscious feeling of superiority, dashed, perhaps, with a shade of imperiousness, which we so often discover in men of the South. It is not surprising that a youth thus nurtured would imbibe mistaken ideas of what constituted strength ; and, scorning all sympathy, wrap the toga of pride about his feelings to conceal the insidious poison slowly sapping the purity and happiness from his vigorous young veins.

“ Smile and the world smiles with you,
Sigh and you sigh alone ;
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.”

Repeating those grim, suggestive words, Stanley placed them as a monitor in his bosom, and turned his face towards the heavily-coming years.

CHAPTER V.

STANLEY resumed his usual duties ; but the familiar scenes, reminding him day by day of all that he had loved and lost, wore the iron too deeply into his soul ; and receiving a letter, at this juncture, from his uncle in Virginia asking him for the hundredth time to pay them all a visit, he placed the business into his brother's hands, packed his valise, and departed for the sad, historic scenes of the Old Dominion.

When he changed cars at Chattanooga, he secured a seat directly in front of a man and woman whom (as they will occupy some space in these pages) we will describe more fully.

The man was large, angular, awkward, good-natured, and full of animal vigor ; while the woman would attract notice in any crowd by the very perfection of her glowing, rustic beauty. Nor was she ignorant of her manifold charms, as the various feminine frivolities with which she was adorned fully attested. One glance at them was sufficient to show they were man and wife, that they were from

the country, and that they thought the baby which they dandled between them was the smartest, prettiest, and altogether the most wonderful baby that ever blessed mother earth with its presence.

The baby's crowings had mingled with Stanley's meditations during all the morning; but, being interested in the scenery along the route, he had persisted in withholding the respect due such an important personage. Rising, however, to procure a cup of water, he glanced down while passing this interesting trio. The baby, with a precocious eye to economy, was lying back in its mother's lap endeavoring to make "both ends meet;" but, in catching Stanley's eye, it abandoned the design, smiled up into his face, and extended both chubby arms.

Following an irresistible impulse, Stanley leaned over, caught up the little innocent, and kissed its smiling lips. Then, bowing to the parents, he replaced the child upon its mother's lap and proceeded to the water-tank.

What mother's heart ever failed to warm towards even an undistinguished-looking stranger that notices her precious babe? This mother was not exempt from the common weakness, and Stanley's unconscious act of diplomacy, coupled with the look of passionate despair which swept over his face as

he caught up the child, enlisted every sympathy of the young mother in his behalf. She was still wondering how the face of one so young, handsome, and seemingly fortune-favored could harbor such a look of awful desolation, when her husband, returning from his self-introduction to Stanley, informed her that the young man was a Mississippi planter. Then every weird dime-novel legend of the South's chivalrous sons (they were Northern people) began trooping through her vividly-imaginative brain; and in twenty minutes she had hoisted him upon a lofty pedestal and placed the most fragrant incense at its base.

She pictured him in the foremost ranks of the Lost Cause, astride a fierce black charger with streams of fire flaming from his nostrils (the horse's not the man's), while his nodding, raven-black plume and sweeping, thrusting, blazing, careering, double and twisting, treble back-action, patent self-repeating, un-keep-up-with-a-ble, Excalibur (the man's not the horse's) struck home-yearnings to the bosom of the enemy. True, he seemed rather young to figure back so far; but, doubtless, he was one of the many boy heroes who adorned that epoch. She pictured his grand old country-seat, with the Dismal Swamp in its back yard, and the

corridors echoing to the stately tread of seventeen cowled ghosts,—ghosts, you know, are indispensable to the dignity of “old families.” But that look,—what business had such a rare *Jupiter tonans* to be miserable? After puzzling in vain over the last question, she turned and began to inspect the *tout ensemble* of this interesting stranger. Noting the small, slender hands, the fair, soft skin, the silken hair and moustache, and the rich, well-fitting attire, she then began to run a critical eye over the ungainly proportions of her husband, failing, for the first time since their marriage, to respond to the broad, good-natured grin which he beamed upon her.

When night closed in, shawls and overcoats were the demand of the hour, as the passengers began making all the arrangements for sleep compatible with their cramped quarters.

Curling up on a seat, with his overcoat for covering, Stanley drifted into uneasy slumber; but the train slackening its speed about midnight aroused him, and, rising to relieve his cramped limbs, he discovered that the porter had neglected the fire, and that the car was uncomfortably cold.

Glancing into the opposite seat, he saw the countrywoman, with her babe folded to her bosom,

peacefully sleeping regardless of the chill atmosphere. It made a pretty sight, this mother and her sleeping child,—a picture of love and purity.

Turning away from the contemplation, Stanley threw his overcoat into the rack above, then, crossing to where the countryman was contentedly snoring beneath a huge great-coat, he roused him and said,—

“ You had better look after your wife and child, my friend, or they will catch their death of cold in this car.”

“ I’ll be gosh-darned if it ain’t cold,” the countryman acknowledged, as he sleepily rubbed his eyes.

“ Take my coat, up there, and throw over them.”

“ But I—you—er—”

“ No buts in the case, my friend ; I am not using it.”

Turning away from the countryman’s thanks, Stanley found the porter, and succeeding in procuring a good fire, settled himself to cigars and thoughts for the night, happily unconscious that the countrywoman, feigning sleep, had witnessed the whole proceeding, and was pressing kisses on the warm fur of his overcoat, while hot tears blinded her eyes.

The countryman and his wife stopped over the

next day to visit the Luray Caverns, but Stanley hurried on to his destination. He arrived the following morning, and was received with open arms by all his uncle's family. He found a quiet, happy fireside and pleasant associates, who, if they knew aught of his past, delicately forbore betraying the fact by word or look; and as each hour was profitably spent amid scenes which held no reminders of his past, that past began to bear less heavily upon him. He felt that the freshness from his life had faded forever, and with it that zest which enables one to live for the mere pleasure of living; felt that he had loved with a love too fiery, unreasoning, and unquestioning, to ever feel the passion again,—had cast, as it were, his soul upon the die and lost. But the scenes which surrounded him were peculiarly favorable to one of his temperament. Each foot of soil he trod, during his excursions over those battle-scarred fields, spoke to his ardent mind of chivalrous deeds and heroic sufferings; and, during the enthusiastic imaginings of the hour, his own petty sorrows sank into insignificance. He found himself listening to the promptings of ambition,—feeling that could he but escape the bounds that narrowed his present existence, he could, by noble enterprises, crown his after-life with, at least, con-

tent. Had these feelings of his higher nature been allowed time for maturity, many things that I will unwillingly chronicle would have never transpired. But, "Devious are the paths by which we are led to our appointed ends."

CHAPTER VI.

RAMBLING, one morning, farther than usual, Stanley became completely bewildered by the general sameness of the surrounding hills; and, after looking in vain for some familiar landmark by which to shape his course, he wandered aimlessly on until he discovered a small farm-house. Rapping on the door, he heard approaching steps, and the next moment it was opened by the veritable country-woman to whom he loaned his overcoat a few nights previous.

"Why, good-morning, Mrs. Bradley," he said, smiling at her astonishment. "I believe we have met before."

"Lor! yessir," she cried; "you are the gentleman—— My! Come in and sit down."

Wheeling up an arm-chair before the blazing logs, and seating him within its capacious depths, she had, in twenty minutes, regaled Stanley with bread, milk, butter, and every trivial incident that had occurred since their separation. Then came that wonderful baby, and Stanley lifted her heart to the seventh heaven by taking it upon his knees and talking baby talk as naturally as if he had been running for the legislature. Then Mr. Bradley came in, and, extending a hearty welcome, began such a learned disquisition about the "lors" and "polertics" of the land that Stanley discovered night and his own unconverted state at its conclusion.

After this, Mrs. Bradley became exceedingly fond of Stanley's cousins, and meeting her so frequently during his rambles, and at the neighboring houses, made him fear it was not altogether by accident; so, to test the matter, on meeting with her late one afternoon, he raised his hat in answer to her blushing greeting, and said, abruptly,—

"By the way, Mrs. Bradley, kiss the baby, and tell your husband good-by for me, as I leave for home to-morrow."

"Leaving!" she exclaimed, with paling cheeks.
"Leaving for good?"

“Yes, madam. Is there anything unusual in that?”

“Yes—no!—that is—oh, Mr. Huntingdon!” she cried, throwing her apron over her face and quivering in every limb, “take me with you! take me with you!”

“This is madness,” Stanley replied, coldly, “or I misinterpret your meaning.”

“It is not madness now, but it will be ere long if I am compelled to remain with the man in yonder house. Oh, sir, I implore you to save me from a home and a husband I loathe.”

“My good woman,” Stanley answered, a grim smile flitting across his lips, “if your husband and yourself are at cross-purposes, go to your people and obtain a divorce; do not take the bull by the horns by eloping with a bachelor.”

“You still misunderstand me,” she exclaimed, stepping nearer. “I was happy in my home until you crossed my path; I have been miserable since; and I feel, at this moment, that death and dishonor in your arms would be heaven compared to life and honor with that man, compelled as I am to endure his loathsome caresses and comfort his hated bed.”

“I really thank you for the compliment your words imply,” Stanley answered, in cool, cutting

tones. "But pray let us dispense with heroics; they are trying to the nerves. Because I chance to out-dress your husband, or perhaps wear a skin somewhat smoother than his, you work yourself into a towering passion for me, when, for aught you know to the contrary, I may be the grandest villain unhung,—may make levanting with other men's wives a specialty. I will leave before you shame your womanhood by speaking further. Good-morning."

"Mr. Huntingdon," she said, as he was turning away, "I believe you have a good heart despite your cruel words, and as you have robbed me of all hope and happiness, I will make one more request."

Stanley paused when he heard these sad, low-spoken words, and said, "I will do anything for you, madam, within the range of reason."

"Then," she said, a deathly pallor overspreading her features, "if you—if I—— Ah, God! how can I make you understand! Sir, could I clasp your second self to this bosom, I could transfer all my love for you to it, and feel I had not lived my life in vain."

Stanley gazed at her a moment in open-eyed astonishment, and, as his eyes dwelt upon the swelling bosom and the rounded, glowing form, a dan-

gerous light leaped to his eyes ; but turning his face aside, he answered,—

“ Madam, I would grant your most extraordinary request, did not thoughts of your innocent babe and unsuspecting husband deter me. That path behind you leads to your home, your virtue, and ultimately, I trust, to your happiness: take it and thank me, hereafter, for not using the power of your matchless folly.”

Rising from the supper-table that night, Stanley’s uncle said, “ Come into the library, Stanley, I have something to tell you. Take that seat. This letter is from your mother, and contains, I fear, some harsh news for you ; so nerve yourself to meet the worst.”

Taking the letter, Stanley ran his eye over the complimentary opening, the neighborhood gossip, etc., until coming to the following paragraph :

“ I have spoken in former communications of Stanley’s approaching marriage with a Miss Redmond. They had, I suppose, some misunderstanding, or lover’s quarrel, which caused Stanley to pay you the present visit. Well, the news came yesterday that she is dead,—died at her brother’s home in Arkansas. The body will be brought to B—— for burial,” etc., etc.

It was terrible to witness the helpless look of gray desolation that overspread Stanley's features as he read those terse sentences; but, without a word, he crushed the letter in his hand and remained in the same posture.

"My dear boy," his uncle said, touching his shoulder, "repining is useless now."

"I am not repining, uncle; I am thinking of the many ways that news affects me. I thought the light within me was dead, and discover I was mistaken,—but this extinguishes it forever. Lena, Lena! my sweet child, my pretty darling, would to God I slept at your side!"

"Hope, old fellow, our mistress sleeps with her victims. Go seek a master who can keep thee employed. This severs the last link that connects me with the past, and I can now lock up the home of my youth. 'Tis done, and never more shall my footsteps echo through its silent halls. What does the new life offer?"

He rose and, crossing the room, leaned against the mantel. After remaining thus a few minutes, he raised his head and a harsh laugh broke from his lips.

"Stanley, you——"

"Do not be uneasy, uncle. I was merely think-

ing of a few ambitious twinges I have felt of late. Ha, ha! I thought of doing something so very fine that it would turn the whole nation green with envy. Well! its complexion stands in very little danger now. *Dum vivimus vivamus*, and the first thing on the tapis is the sweet friend from whom I just parted. Ha, ha! her gentle wish shall be gratified, or never more call me a man. I see, uncle, your longings to know more are trying to your good breeding; so I will place you at ease, by informing you that it is utterly useless to question me. May your dreams be pleasanter than mine. Good-night." With a bitter laugh, he strode off to his room, where his footsteps echoed without intermission until dawn.

Coming out upon the porch as the sun was rising, Stanley beckoned to a bright-looking mulatto boy, who was standing by the front gate.

"Jakey, my pretty lad," he said, when the boy approached, "I have heard you recommended for secrecy and despatch, and choose you to bear a love-token for me. As you value that carcass of yours, make no miscarriage. Give this into none but the lady's hands, and into hers where no eye can see you. Here is some money, which I will double when you return."

Taking the letter, with an intelligent nod, the boy disappeared, and about noon he returned with the following note :

“ Bless you for reconsidering your decision. *He* leaves at twelve o’clock, and will remain away until to-morrow. I have promised to spend the night at a neighbor’s; but you and I will see about that. Come immediately after dinner; I could not survive the afternoon in suspense. Bless you.”

“ Oh-hé ! the physician has accepted his fee, the nurse is in waiting, the hour for the interesting accouchement has arrived, and a second Jasper Hewlitt (curses on him !) will soon be presented to the world. So be it; I do not think my conscience will allow me to remain long in swaddling-clothes. Conscience ! Bah ! What is conscience but education ? And from this hour, with common sense for my usher, I will play the professor to myself. Conscience be hanged ! My ancestors burned heretics and hanged witches for the glory of God (who, according to their tenets, is surprisingly fond of blood and suffering), and shot, skinned, and scalped Indians for pastime; while, did I shoot my dear friend Hewlitt in self-defence, his gibbering ghost would dog my heels the rest of my days. Conscience ! My mother, had she so chosen, could have

trained me up to worship her cast-off shoe ; yet, now, as an inquiring mind prompts me to gaze into other folds, my craven soul begins to dodge imaginary thunderbolts. Oh, ye annals of faith, ye wrecks of exploded theories, ye luminous pages that shadow forth man's wonderously anomalous dance, nerve my cowardly heart until my mind threads this pathetically intricate path which leads 'tis said to—God knows where.

“Heigh-ho ! it is time I was flying to the arms of my soul's idol. I must lay in a stock of such phrases with which to cram her too willing ears, for my bosom cannot command sufficient nourishment to bud an appropriate term.

“‘And the Queen of the South shall rise as a witness against them.’ Well, Solomon furnished her with an heir regardless of ceremonies ; so, I will imagine this lady to be the Queen of the North and do likewise. Is this the end of all my glorious dreams ? Oh ! God, is this the end, is this the end ?”

CHAPTER VII.

A SMALL white cottage, shadowed by lofty elms and half hidden by climbing vines, stands bathed in the soft May sunshine. A young girl issues from its peaceful doors and, letting herself out of the yard-gate, runs lightly across the road into the woods beyond, where a huge vine forms swings and seats with its Briarean trunk. Seating herself, she opens a book and essays to read, but by degrees the volume slips from her fingers to her lap, and from there to the ground, while the large blue eyes gaze dreamily off through the sombre forest. The heavy coils of her fair, luxuriant tresses have escaped their ribbons, and, falling in prodigal profusion over her sloping shoulders, lie in billowy folds upon the ground. Seated thus, in unstudied grace, with the woodland breezes playing across her delicate cheeks, she seems like some fabled wood-nymph waiting the appearance of a luckless mortal on whom to cast her siren's spell. Yet the beholder unconsciously leaves the contemplation of the rare blonde beauty and the exquisite grace of the rounded form

to watch the serene light lurking in the pure depths of the sweet, asking eyes. It is a face seldom seen, and never forgotten. A face to which we naturally turn for sympathy when others have wounded us, or for strength when sorely tempted. A tender, womanly, Christian face,—one that forgets self in the presence of a sacrifice, and one that we would wish at our side to cheer our fainting spirit when the angel of death sends his inexorable summons.

She had been seated thus but a few minutes, when her dreams were disturbed by the hoof-beats of a rapidly-ridden horse. To judge from the soft color that stole into her rounded cheeks, her dreams and that rider were closely connected.

In a few moments the horseman dashed into sight, and we recognize Stanley Huntingdon, who is four years older than when last we met,—years that have rounded out the slenderness of youth into the strength and elegance of manhood,—years that have stamped maturity on the vigorous, handsome face,—but, alas, years that have lit the brilliantly-flashing eyes with careless mockery, and disfigured the lips with a derisive sneer which the dark, drooping moustache cannot entirely conceal.

Dashing up within a few bounds of the waiting girl before reining the pony back upon its haunches,

he then sprang from the saddle and, advancing with a ludicrous grimace of contrition on his facile features, exclaimed,—

“*Peccavi!* Blondine, or rather my pony has. The shameless rascal, regardless of his promise to fetch me hither, concluded he would spend the day, chasing butterflies, in the clover-field, so I was belated while persuading him that his broken promise would preclude all beatification in celestial clover-patches.”

“Apologies are unnecessary,” she answered, with a smile, as he threw himself on the turf at her feet, “I have been here but a few minutes.”

“What a glorious day!” he said, stretching himself more at ease. “What a delightful spot! so cool, calm, and sequestered; which last fact makes it doubly delightful. And, best of all, how peerlessly beautiful you are looking this morning!”

“You appear pleased with everything to-day,” she answered, looking down into his laughing eyes, “which is more than I can claim for you on your last visit.”

“Well, you see, you began sermonizing that day,” he replied, lighting a cigar, “and as it reminded me of my unpardonable dereliction of all the past week’s prayers, my gentle spirit naturally became

ruffled. In all soberness, Blondine, I think this sad old earth is funereal enough with the obfuscating salmagundi called religion that whiskered lips from counter-pulpits weekly hurl at our bewildered heads without the girls—earth's lone Pleiades—utterly extinguishing us in Tartarean darkness by veiling their bright eyes with the missionary's sombrous milky-way. I should have more gallantry than to say that, I suppose, but the incandescence of my humanitarian love (prompting me to shield those few forlorn brothers that do struggle in the unreligious light of common sense) forces me into this unchivalric attitude. For superstition flows like bubbling nectar from rosy lips; and I know my poor, weak strugglers would straggle unsuspicuously up to the new-fangled fountain, get gloriously drunk, and unconditionally surrender earth's dismantled stronghold,—common sense. I know you are imagining that I have gotten all tangled up in this amiable diatribe, but you are mistaken, as I could easily prove if I were not out of breath."

"I can very well dispense with the proof," the girl answered, sadly. "You are incorrigible on that subject, Stanley, so let it rest between us forever. What have you been doing since I saw you last?"

"Reforming. I see you look incredulous, but I

assure you that I went out to the races Friday, and losing all my cash on the first race failed to bet on the last; now if that isn't reforming I would like to hear you name it."

"The way you are talking," Blondine said, laughing in spite of herself, "reminds me of what a friend said of you, that 'you were drunker when sober than when drunk.'"

"He was about right," Stanley replied, carelessly. "I never was drunk, but when I drink it steadies me instead of befuddling my brain and betangling my legs."

"Why do you drink at all?"

"To be fashionable, I suppose."

"Stanley, do you ever think real seriously about—"

"Now, my dear Blondine, you are selecting a text, and I give you fair warning before your sermon is well under way I will be up and off; for you have such an unaccountable knack of hitting the truth that it makes a fellow feel uncomfortable. My dear, dear child, you well know that preachers are my pet aversion, so why will you persist in joining the ranks? Excuse me if I speak rudely, but I am cornered off, button-holed, and my shortcomings moaned over sufficiently elsewhere, without

having it repeated here, the place to which I come for rest."

He was lighting another cigar, and did not see how his last words affected the gentle girl, nor what a struggle it cost her to force the tears from her voice before saying,—

"I do not wish to annoy you, Stanley, but you cannot imagine how it pains me to see one so eminently capable as yourself of accomplishing great things frittering away his brilliant talents in prodigal folly."

Stanley looked up at her with a quizzical light in his eyes, as he answered,—

"Oh, faithful echo of my once lambkin bosom! But, Blondine, your generous pity for my wasted brilliancy stirs my usually Sadducean bosom, and I will relate a short history which will conclusively prove to you that sapient philosophy, not thoughtless folly, governs my actions.

"In the year of our Lord 18—I visited, as you know, California. Let me remark by way of parenthesis that I was a full-grown lamb in those days; recklessly in search of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. I had, however, received a few gentle shakes from this motherly old world, but, until then, she had failed deplorably to shake any

good, hard sense into my cranium; so I thought there were loftier paths and grander fields above the ken of common men, where (with the aid of those brilliant talents that you accuse me of possessing) I expected to win my way, found the long-dreamed-of Utopia, and settle placidly down into a dream of aurora borealean bliss. Don't ask me how I intended to accomplish this Aladdian wonder; for, far from feeling sure about the *modus operandi*, I now have a faint suspicion that I was somewhat hazy as to just exactly what I wanted. I wanted something, however, and have it I would or die.

“Well, I was sitting in the upper story of the San Franciscan library one day, when the table at which I sat began to dance the ‘Fisher’s Hornpipe’; the chandeliers grew generous and made the floor a present of their globes; while the book-shelves became equally as reckless. On glancing up to discover the cause of the general instability, I saw men, without pausing as usual to select the best hat on the rack, dash headlong down the stairs; while the ladies, regardless of flashing stockings, caught up their skirts and tumbled after their lords and masters in equally as undignified haste. So, after an hour’s search, I finally corralled one man who was calm enough to tell me it was an earthquake.

I tell you, my dear Blondine, if I thought every earthquake would shake as much sense into me as that one did, I would send on word to shake us up daily for the next nineteen years. I acknowledge that at first I was foolish enough to feel hurt. It had rung up a new curtain, and my simple, child-like faith in my kind became utterly demolished before the Punch and Judy show thus exposed. I had seen hoary-headed philosophers whitewashed with fear into very unphilosophical contortions ; I had seen sage *blue-stockings* cut unblue-stocking figures ; and all because our long-suffering mother wished to exercise her dear old limbs by making a dignified pirouette.

“From that hour,” he continued, after a pause, in which a look of hopeless sadness had replaced the mocking light in his eyes, “I abandoned the pursuit of my phantasmagoria, and, aided by the light of metaphysics, began the study of man himself. This is a sad subject, Blondine, and one to which I seldom revert. I have been accused of infidelity and relegated to Tertullian’s hell, that comfortable repository for all obnoxious persons, by many worthy acquaintances of mine, but they are mistaken. I am no more an infidel than you are. Although I doubt not God, God knows I doubt

man. I find him the same to-day that he was yesterday, only a little older and possibly a shade wiser. Where yesterday he traced his ancestry up to the gods, to-day he traces it to royalty, Normandy, the Mayflower, the Old Dominion, and elsewhere; where he once burned you or sawed you asunder for differing from his faith or politics, he now ostracizes you or injures you financially; where he once burned libraries and taught damnation was your own did you aspire to knowledge outside the pales of the church, he now loads you with contempt or raises the voice of denunciation; where he once demanded bloody altars and human lives, he now demands golden shrines and curtailment of liberty,—thus ranges the suggestive antithesis throughout the entire calendar. Take him in his savage, bloody-minded infancy, mark how his disgustingly-superstitious habits fell away before the march of time; follow that march and witness how, fast as one folly fell from him, he seized another, perhaps a shade less foolish; then size him up to-day, lay him out, measure him, weigh him, discover how contemptible he yet remains, and see if the mind does not sicken with the appalling suggestions, while the heart cries out for something more palpable than faith."

“Ah, Stanley, Stanley, why harbor such unquiet thoughts? You are not your brother’s keeper, and will answer for no sins but your own. Cast such unworthy reasoning aside, place implicit, childlike trust on the Book of Truth, and these unhealthy vapors will drift away from your mind.”

“That sounds well, Blondine,” Stanley answered, shaking his head slowly; “but, alas, the mind that has outgrown its simple trust and reverence can find no balm in Gilead.

“Man’s reason was given him to use, I suppose. At least its use is not forbidden while he is gauging the tides, weighing the winds, chaining the lightnings, and defending himself,—small matters in themselves,—but when it comes to his own salvation, a question embracing inconceivable joy or pain for an eternity, he is asked to forego his usual prerogative, become as a thoughtless child and accept—what? A rule of faith patterned among others in superstitious darkness; collected and wrangled over by body after body of stupidly-bigoted fanatics, and floated to us across a sea of blood. Ah, God, thy will should be as plain as thy handiwork.”

There was a long silence when he ceased speaking, broken by the soft sigh that fluttered across Blondine’s lips, as she sat looking sadly down into

Stanley's averted face. He heard the sigh, and, looking up at her, said, gently,—

“Such themes are bootless now, my dear Blondine, and I hope you will pardon me for boring you with them. I know it pains you to hear me questioning with rude tongue the creeds that your pure heart firmly trusts. But you are the only one to whom I can open my soul, and with my accustomed selfishness I thoughtlessly obtain relief at the expense of your happiness. I have known you a long time, Blondine, and you have proved the truest, gentlest friend that ever an unhappy mortal claimed. I have been thinking, for months, of——”

The low, seductive tones drifted into silence, and the girl, glancing down, saw by his absent look and scowling brows that he had completely forgotten her presence. With an indulgent smile that proved she was accustomed to his vagaries, she leaned back and waited patiently until he aroused from his reverie.

Rising, he leaned against the vine at her side, and, taking up one of the small hands, said, softly,—

“This hour, Blondine, must decide whether or not we part forever.”

A strange, half-pitying smile hovered around his lips as he noticed her little hand at the words “part

“forever” impulsively touch his arm ; but, bending nearer, he continued, in low, winning tones,—

“Blondine, my beautiful, is it surprising that while enjoying your society as a friend my sinful heart has bowed itself in love and humbleness before your pure nature ? Is it surprising that the wish has grown upon me to transplant your lovely form to my own fireside ? Ah, my precious darling, if your innocent love would lead the way I could find my grave by a truer path.”

The girl raised her eyes to his, and the unspeakable love raying out from their liquid depths was his answer. But, ah, what is it that brings that dark, remorseful look to his eyes, as he gazes down into the tender, trusting face pressed against his bosom ?

“Blondine,” he said, slipping his hand under her chin and raising the sweet, trembling lips to his, “I believed that you loved me before I spoke, yet you remember my saying this hour must decide whether or not we are to part. There is a trial still in store for you. Are you as brave as you are true ?”

“Could there be anything more bitter than parting ?”

“I hope not,” he replied, with a quick catch of his voice ; “but I fear the test with which I mean to

try your love is more than your exquisite sensibilities can bear ; and now, even now, with your kisses warm upon my lips and your dear form in my arms, I beg you, unless your love is prepared to bear much from me, to retreat while there is time. Think well."

Her answer was a confident smile, as she nestled closer to him.

"Blondine," he said, paling to his very lips, "life has but little to offer us, and without love it is intolerable. While we live let us live, has been my motto for years, caused from my having no hope, no ambition ; but if your love proves its deathless strength my future will hold a purpose, and my later years will witness the full fruition of all that my boyhood dreamed.

"The love that I claim must not only be free from all suspicion, but it must be capable of rising above the petty regulations and the phantom fears that restrain our shallow-minded race. It must be as willing to crucify the feeling implanted by the present schooling as I am willing to lay down my life at the feet of her whose love will undertake all this. And now, Blondine, my sweet child, can you place your hand in mine and follow me into a realm of my own founding ? Even though every step

crushes some precept of your past, and outrages every sentiment inculcated by your Christian training? I do not ask this lightly, as God is my witness, and as you would know could you see the source that nourishes the wish. I hope to fold you ere many weeks to my bosom as my wife, but before that you must place some of that simple unquestioning faith in me that you yield to your religion. I have dreamed of such love since boyhood, but until this hour it has proven a delusion. Will you let it remain delusive, or will you prove a woman's breast can hold such love?"

Not wishing to frighten her unprepared mind by a too sudden revealment of his meaning, he uttered those insidiously sinister words in a slow, careless voice; but when she raised her clear, unsuspecting eyes to his, he realized that her innocent mind had utterly failed to comprehend his drift.

"Stanley," she said, looking fearlessly into his eyes, "I will speak plainly, for you are too honorable to take advantage of my speech.

"When I first met you I saw you were recklessly sinful, and had you possessed no redeeming qualities I would have turned from you in horror; but, like rays of lightning, your true self would flash from the clouds of sin enveloping you, revealing to

the beholder all the grand possibilities that lurked in your nature. I saw you were a combination of strength and weakness, and *that*, coupled with your bright, generous feelings and wayward disposition, appealed irresistibly to my woman's heart. I first hoped for you, then prayed for you, then loved you, and, ah, how often despaired! Many a time has my heart revolted against you on hearing you express some atrociously wicked sentiment, but the next moment a ray of true feeling flashing through your jeers would reclaim its allegiance. Many a time have I resolved to steel my bosom against you on hearing of some unusually sinful escapade, but you would come with your laughing eyes and jesting tongue, and make me forget I ever formed the resolution. *That*," she continued, a soft smile playing about her lips, "was when I did not know you loved me; but now, since you have told your love and said I could lead you into a purer life, ah, what sacrifice would be too great?"

Stanley gazed a moment into the fearlessly trusting eyes of the unsuspecting girl, as she began that loving, unselfish revealment of all her most sacred feelings, then his eyes turned off through the silent woodland, and, as she proceeded, a look of almost unearthly despair stiffened his features. He could

not have looked more utterly appalled and desolate had his soul, with prophetic vision ranging throughout eternity, discovered its own awful destiny.

The girl trembled with fear on noticing his frozen look, and, placing her hand on his shoulder, whispered, "What is it, Stanley? Oh, what is it?"

Shaking her hand from his shoulder, he turned his now darkly gleaming eyes upon her and exclaimed,—

"I have felt for many months that Satan had a bill of sale for me, but I had never read the awful document until the past ten minutes. You have shown me a heart so true, a mind so free from guile, that my guilty soul stands abashed, and, standing here beneath the bright canopy of heaven and looking into your lovelit eyes, it is impossible for me to name the damnable conditions I once intended. You struck me in an awkward place when you accused me of having honor, and may owe more to the chance remark than you will ever know this side your grave. Honor and myself have long since parted company, but towards you I will maintain at least its semblance, and may the angel of mercy blot this hour from your untainted life!"

Struggling a moment in vain for further speech, he turned away with a fierce gesture, and, mounting

his pony, rode rapidly away, leaving the girl petrified with bewildered fear.

“What is it? O my God, what is it?” she murmured, dazedly; but a look of awful horror began to gather in her eyes as her mind, recalling his words, began to grasp their fatal meaning. Sinking, with a low moan, upon her knees, she began pleading for strength to bear the unexpected blow; yet, with that unreasoning, unexplainable, and sublime, self-forgetful devotion of a loving, true-hearted woman, her first petition was for the one who had traitorously outraged every sacred feeling in her bosom.

Thus for hours beneath the silent trees, and under the calmly-bending heavens, the stricken girl wrestled with her agony; but when at last she bent her exhausted steps towards her home, the serene light beaming from her dark blue eyes proved her soul had found comfort during that unseen covenant with the God of the fatherless and the motherless.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ HOME, May —th, 18—.

“ MY DEAR BLONDINE :

“ I thought when I left you that the mantle of silence had fallen between us forever ; but there is a burning something within my bosom that will not allow me to rest beneath the wrong I did you. No palliation can be found for my heinous offence, and I will not insult you with attempted excuses or explanations. Even if I endeavored to do so, your pure mind could not understand ; for you have never felt the sway of a diseased and perverted heart, which, sick of itself and its surroundings, finds existence insupportable unless excited by the pursuit of some iniquitous scheme. Your very purity and Christian training gave an added zest to the pursuit, and, struggle as I would against the hell-engendered feelings, I was borne swiftly on to my shame. But enough of that. I have thought a great deal, Blondine, since separating from you ; and—oh, Blondine, writing is cold work—I cannot

express on paper the troubled feelings that roll through my bosom. Let me come to you; I wish to lay my life at your feet as a partial atonement for what I did; to explain how I loathe my past, and wish by your aid to redeem it in the future; to show you we can, by running the gauntlet together, gain the cover of our grave with fewer scars; to show my bosom contains but one wish, and that is to gain your forgiveness; that my life holds but one aim, and that is by years of labor prove the sincerity of my repentance. I have sinned, Blondine, I have sinned. My past is a wilderness of crimes; and it is surprising to myself that I am able to ask you to place your pure life into my keeping. But you knew I was wicked before, and you trusted me; will you not now forget my crowning act of shamelessness and come to me? Come, and in the happiness of the new life we will forget the pain of the old.

“If your heart turns from me in loathing, and you shrink from trusting me again, let my past, of which you know not, plead for me and prevent you from adding your displeasure to my already overburdened soul. You do not know, you do not know! Oh, Blondine, Blondine, were there more such spirits as yours in this unhappy world, there

would be fewer pangs in my bosom and fewer sins upon my soul to-night.

“Your unworthy friend,

“STANLEY HUNTINGDON.”

The day Blondine received this unmanly, incoherent letter, she read it again and again. Her innocent mind failed to detect its selfishness; and as she wandered restlessly about the grounds, it required all the light given her during the past two days to banish all the bright possibilities of which her heart whispered. She glanced more than once towards the spot that witnessed their parting interview; but, as if fearing to trust herself upon a spot so fraught with both tender and painful associations, she abruptly turned away.

Entering her room at nightfall, she sat down by the open window and, resting her arms upon the sill, gazed long into the outer darkness. The cool breezes floated in, bearing the fragrance of blossoming flowers upon their wings. A mocking-bird sang its mate to sleep in a neighboring cedar. Fireflies gleamed and sparkled amid the shadows, while the lonely cry of a whippoorwill came ringing out from the dark woodland. As she was turning from the window with a low sigh, a sound caught her

ears which arrested the movement and froze the warm blood in her veins. It was nothing more than the harsh notes of an owl booming through the forest, as it scolded and ha, ha'd with its mate,—a sound familiar to her ears since childhood, but to-night it seemed like the wild laugh of an exultant demon gloating over her fallen hopes. Burying her face in her arms with a shuddering moan, she remained motionless until the weird laughter ceased to reverberate through the silent night. Then, turning to a table, she began the following letter :

“MY DEAR STANLEY :

“I have read your letter many times to-day, and, fearing to allow my weak nature to act the umpire in a subject so fraught with weal or woe to us both, I have sought guidance from a Source that knows no erring.

“What you ask is impossible, Stanley. I have had dreams in the past of being your guide, your helper, but the past two days have dispelled them forever. I would injure you and do myself an injustice by accepting your offer. Look no longer to a mortal weak as yourself for aid ; but let the knowledge of your fatally-brilliant powers constrain

you to carry your cause to a higher court than that of earth. There, and there only, rests your safety.

“It pains me to know you are suffering, and yet it makes me glad ; for only through such repentance can our hearts be purified. And, oh ! may it widen until it embraces all whom you have wronged, and mount until it reaches the God you are wronging every hour.

“I have finished, yet I dread to fold this page ; for it seems like crossing the dead hands of some cherished friend. Your sins, Stanley, have separated us in this life ; will you let them separate us in the next ? Think of it, and may God help you and forgive you as fully as I do at this moment. Farewell. It is best we should never meet again. Farewell. Stanley, never a mother watched the erring steps of a son with more solicitude than I have followed your wayward course. How long will you continue thus to fight against my prayers ? Farewell. Oh ! Stanley, Stanley, do not misunderstand this letter. Do not misinterpret my refusal ; it is not caused by your act, for your letter proves you have repented ; but it is caused by the knowledge that act has given me. Once more, farewell.

“From your sincere friend,

“BLONDINE.”

The months rolled slowly away, bringing to Blondine diversified rumors of Stanley's course. One day he was seen at church, the next at a horse-race ; one night spent by a bed of sickness, the next at a ball ; now shut for weeks in the seclusion of his library, now chasing deer through the cane-brakes of the Mississippi bottoms ; and, as she guessed the dark remorse that urged him on in his varied, restless course, her prayers for him arose without intermission. Later on, rumors began to reach her of his failing fortunes, and of his determination to leave the country. She wished to hear more definitely ; and while hesitating about writing and asking him she received the following note :

“ Well, Blondine, the jig is up, the fiddlers have struck for higher wages,—that is, your humble servant has ‘suspended payment,’ and will depart ere long for the West, the land of gold, the muchly-famed California. Would it be asking too much if I begged of you a farewell interview ? As I will never revisit these hills, it will be a farewell interview in truth. I should not ask it of you, perhaps ; but man is proverbially selfish, and I could not rest in a distant grave did I not bid you, my one true friend, farewell. Meet me at our old rendezvous. Until then good-by.

STANLEY.”

Returning an affirmative answer, Blondine sought the place of meeting, and sat lost in meditation until the steady tramp of his horse aroused her. He did not come dashing up this morning, as was his wont, but rode slowly up to within a few feet of the girl before reining in his pony.

She looked up, as he did not offer to dismount, and thus they silently noted the changes which time had wrought in each.

She saw his lips had lost their curl of defiance, his eyes no longer blazed with the stirring of passion, and saw the ravages of ill-health in his colorless face and attenuated form.

“Well, Blondine, the past year has dealt more kindly with you than with me,” he said, dismounting and approaching her.

“You do look as if you were suffering,” she answered, in a shocked tone. “I had not heard your health was failing.”

“It manages to pour when it rains, you know,” he said, with a short laugh. “I have drawn too heavily on the bank of life the past five years, and I suppose the grim banker will call for a settlement shortly. So be it; I am content.”

“Content! Oh, Stanley——”

“Come, Blondine, leave my beautiful and vir-

tuous life undisussed. I came to-day to speak of other matters."

Sitting down by her, he looked earnestly in her face a moment, and continued,—

"Blondine, I hope you will pardon me if I speak of a painful subject; but I wish to ask if your mind has undergone any changes during the past year concerning the answer you made to my offer."

"None," she replied, gently. "One reason I had for wishing to see you to-day was to tell you that in a few months I am to be married."

"Married!" he echoed, in astonishment. "Are you jesting, Blondine?"

"No."

"Do I know the man?"

"Yes; it is Mr. Bernard."

"One of my pet aversions," he said, his eyes lighting up with some of their old fire. "Is it possible I will have to love the entire fraternity for your sake?"

"I hoped that you had forgotten your old antipathy towards ministers," she replied, "as I have heard of your attending church several times during the past year."

"Sheer curiosity enticed me there," he answered, carelessly. "I have been studying up the ministers,

the same as I would any other rare animal. Oh, Blondine, I can't believe you ! I can't believe you !" he exclaimed, sadly. " You are either jesting with me, or sacrificing yourself to some mistaken idea. Sinful and worthless as I am, I know that your heart is mine ; and——"

" Stanley," Blondine said, in a pained voice, " if you are my friend, if you even respect me, please say no more on that subject."

" But, Blondine, I have much to say, much to urge ; you cannot imagine all I wish to tell you. I——"

" It is useless, utterly useless, and would pain us both ; so leave it unsaid."

Looking at her a moment in silence, a slow, dejected smile then came to his lips, as he answered,—

" Well, ' what won't be, won't be, if it does happen.' This, however, dispels several roseate dreams of mine, as I was expecting to persuade you to go with me to the West."

" When will you leave ?"

" Immediately, and the earlier now the better, as I am discovering after it is too late that man is not one-fourth as black as I have painted him. When reverses came upon me, I expected the majority of my friends to dance jubilee over my downfall, and

nerved myself to bear it with Christian fortitude ; but many, whom I looked upon as secret enemies, have come forward with words of encouragement and offers of assistance, asking no other security than my honor. It is the worst punishment, however, they could impose upon me ; for it shows me up to myself in my true colors. Had they held an indignation meeting and rode me out of the county on a rail, I could have muzzled my impudent conscience with 'More sinned against than sinning,' and other such pharisaical phrases with which sinners, generally, anoint their precious souls. But for men whom I have wronged to come with open purses and offers of condolence ! Ugh ! that's just a little too much. Well, there is nothing in the world easier than becoming a philosopher ; just discover you are a fool, and then you are a philosopher.

"I have refused all offers of assistance, however, for I wrought the ruin alone, and alone I will suffer the consequences. I can save enough from the wreck to settle my mother comfortably for life and to take me to my destination. Once there, I can work or starve, whichever pleases me best. As I cannot take you with me, I will be all alone in my glory. And should I conclude to secure lodgings

in the Pacific Ocean, it will inconvenience no one but myself."

"Stanley, you——"

"Now, Blondine, don't read me a lecture on the audacity of choosing my own time to visit the other country; for I assure you—though satisfied of a warm reception there—nothing is farther from my mind than hastening the excursion. No, no! I will mosey on to a natural end through sheer curiosity. I am twenty-four years of age, and feel like an octogenarian; so I intend to nurse myself up to that age, if possible, just for the pleasure of discovering how old I will then feel. Ha, ha! if my feelings keep step with my years, as they have done hitherto, I imagine I would affect Methuselah, were he living, as Littimer affected young Copperfield."

Stanley paused, and, looking a few moments at Blondine's sweet, truthful face, continued,—

"Well, Blondine, your friends and mine are not the same, and we cannot indulge in the intoxicating bliss of making rag-babies of the characters of our mutual Davids; so, as you have laid an embargo on certain subjects, I will bid you farewell. Farewell! what a lonesome word! We will never meet again, Blondine, and under the shadow of that thought I will say that which otherwise would have

never passed my lips. My levity is not all real ; I have had my best feelings—Oh, bah ! I am singing the time-worn song of every sinner. I am an unblushing scoundrel without one palliating feature ; nevertheless, I hope you will think as kindly of me as possible when I am far away. You chose well in selecting a husband, and may your life be as richly blessed as you deserve ; that is asking a great deal. Blondine," he continued, rising and taking her hand, "Time, the world's tireless Santa Claus, is daily scattering presents at our feet ; and if he leaves misfortune with you at any future day, I hope you will remember my name. This is a selfish request, for I want to enjoy the luxurious feeling of having done one good act, made one person happier. Will you do so?"

While Blondine listened to this rambling, serio-sarcastic speech of Stanley's, she realized that his eyes were open at last, and, though looking with weary indifference on all about him, the light thus gained had made him more humane and considerate, —realized that, though still occasionally interlarding his speech with flashes of satirical humor, it was more from habit than from feeling ; and her gentle bosom was filled with joy at the thought that the bitter scoffer was no more.

Rising, as he asked would she claim his assistance if misfortune assailed her, she said,—

“You know I would; and, oh! Stanley, how happy you have made me!”

Seeing his look of surprise at this exclamation, she continued,—

“I mean by the change I discover in you. You have endeavored to conceal it by mockings; but ah, Stanley, I have studied you too long to be easily deceived. I have always felt that God would reclaim you; and since seeing you to-day I can send you from me with perfect confidence. I know the thought that I am here in the dear old home praying for you will withhold you from evil deeds, should temptation assail you during your companionless wanderings.”

As he gazed down into the eager, winsome face raised to his, that same slow, dejected smile came again to his lips; and, drawing her gently into his arms, he said, as he bent and kissed her tenderly, reverently, “Do not be too confident, Blondine: I may disappoint you; but, if there is anything on God’s great globe that can reclaim and retain me, it is the thought of your angel face.”

CHAPTER IX.

LET the reader leave the cotton-crowned hills of Mississippi and go with us to the wave-beaten shores of the West, where Stanley Huntingdon is practising his first steps in economy.

The excitement of closing out his business, taking leave of his friends, and the long, tedious trip aboard an emigrant car, told heavily upon his weakened frame; and, on arriving in San Francisco, he was barely able to drag his steps about the city.

He, like all persons going West, supposed that "jobs" were running astray in that land of gold, and that if he merely hinted a desire to work twenty opportunities would be tendered him at once; so, concluding to recuperate a while before accepting any situation, he locked up the cheap room which he had secured and sought the coast.

He whiled away the summer wandering among the mighty redwoods which cover the hills and cañons around Aptos and Santa Cruz, and bathing in the numberless resorts which that beautiful bay

affords. Then, crossing to Monterey, he spent several weeks idling among its ancient buildings, through its famous groves, and breasting the huge billows which bellow unceasingly along that stormy shore. The pure air acted like old wine upon his feeble pulse; his sluggish blood began coursing with its wonted vigor, while the rich color once more dyed his cheeks; and after another month spent in mountain-climbing around Gilroy, San José, and Santa Clara, he felt that Richard was himself again, and determined to return and lay San Francisco under lasting obligations to him by easing it of one of its encumbering jobs; but found, alas! like many a poor wretch who seeks the West with rainbow visions, that life is as intensely real there as in Eastern and less favored States. It never occurred to his mind that the very powers which assured him success in prosperity would defeat him now; nor did it occur that, notwithstanding his familiarity with both ancient and modern literature, and a varied knowledge of the world and his kind generally, he was, after all, nothing more than a country innocent when it came to grappling with business problems and measuring his mind with business men. It never occurred that possibly his footsteps might become bewildered in the laby-

rinthine turnings which lay unexplored before him, nor that in competition with men who had trod those turnings from their swaddling-clothes he would be elbowed aside and distanced in the race. None of these humiliating thoughts suggested themselves until later; so there was no shadow of the coming events on his face, as he pocketed his letters of recommendation and sallied out to select a situation.

It began to dawn upon him after the first day that the city would not have inundated its streets with tears had he failed to appear on the scene entirely. Three days convinced him that the people thought they might possibly rub along somehow if he refused to assist them altogether, while a week made him believe they could bid him *bon voyage* with perfect equanimity. He did find some openings, however, thanks to his pluck and perseverance, and on applying for the position would have his laudatory letters read and the question, "Have you ever engaged in this business before?" shot at him like a thunderbolt. "No," he would begin; "but ——" "Excuse me, sir, but I need a man who is thoroughly posted in this line. I am rather pressed for time this morning. Ah! must you go? Then take a cigar, Mr. Huntingdon, take a cigar. From Mississippi? Like to go there. Fine country!"

Hope you will succeed. Call around again. Good-morning."

This interesting conversation was repeated from place to place, till it buzzed through Stanley's brain, oppressing him like a living nightmare with a sense of his disqualifications. He saw men possessing not half of his native talents lifted into lucrative positions, while he was turned away; and, after thinking over the matter a while, the reason became palpable. He realized that while others had been serving terms in this work-day world with an eye to just such positions, he had been cultivating his imagination, idling through the depths of his native woodlands, or lounging, fishing-pole in hand, on the banks of some dark lagoon. While others had been studying the laws of trade, the secrets of friendly or political influence, and other unfathomable mysteries with which man, with an eye to protection or aggression, cloaks his moneyed interests, he had been travelling among the clouds on the wings of some mighty bard, or tossing restlessly upon a midnight couch, as his mind wasted its energies plotting the consummation of some shameful intrigue.

Realizing, more fully day by day, the wide difference between himself and those about him, Stanley

slackened his arduous pursuit after employment, and engaged in the still more arduous task of killing time as he idled listlessly about the city. The thought of seeking the favorable patronage of some man of influence did not occur to his haughty mind ; and, had it done so, he would doubtless have spurned it from him in contempt ; for his spirit had stood erect and independent too long to begin bending its knee for favors. And had necessity compelled him, and an opportunity been afforded, he would have been utterly ignorant of the most approved style of procedure ; and so elephantine would have been the attempt that those to whom his spirit knelt would have spurned him.

As he wandered thus, discouraged and disconsolate, about the city, his eyes would often mechanically seek the bay, but as often his mocking speech to Blondine about hastening his visit to the other country would recur to his mind ; and so peculiarly constructed is the human make-up that those thoughtless words deterred him from seeking desperate remedies for present ills more effectually than dread of the grave and of the unknown. "No, no," he muttered, with a grim smile ; "I will 'mosy on to a natural end' if I have to break stones along the route to pay my fare."

Between his room and the restaurant at which he ate his meals was a large block of buildings in course of erection. He had stopped there so often in going back and forth that he had become familiar with several of the workmen; especially so with one, a tall, large-limbed, broad-shouldered young fellow, who was a New Yorker by birth, and Raines by name, as he learned during several of their short conversations.

While watching Raines joint some window-jambs one morning, Stanley suddenly turned to him and said,—

“Do you need any more workmen, Mr. Raines? If so, I would like to obtain employment from you.”

“Did you ever work at this before?”

“Good God!” Stanley exclaimed, springing from the bench on which he had been seated.

“Hoity-toity! Can’t a man ask a civil question?” Raines said, looking at him in surprise.

“Certainly,” Stanley answered, breaking into a laugh; “but that question has been put to me so often of late, that it sounds like a dirge of the damned. No, Mr. Raines, I have never worked at carpentry for a living; but I can do as you did: I can learn.”

“But why do you choose this trade for——”

"I will briefly state my case," Stanley interrupted, "which will save breath and golden moments. I am a native Mississippian, and my present occupation, much against my natural inclination, is loafing. I arrived in this city several months ago with vaulting ideas of Western resources, which reality has unconditionally collapsed ; though, I must confess, the country is not entirely to blame. My past life endowed me with such a fund of ignorance that it blocks up what avenues do otherwise remain invitingly open ; so, the consequence is, I am stranded high and dry upon a dissolving purse ; and unless——"

"Say, stranger, sprinkle in a few every-day words, will you ? The clatter and crash of my trade has dulled my brain so that it cannot take in too many jaw-twisters at once."

"Well," Stanley replied, with a laugh, "I'm busted and want work. Will that answer?"

"Yes ; sounds more like a Christian," Raines answered, scratching his thumb and looking hard at Stanley. "Would you work under my orders?"

"Certainly."

After operating a few moments longer on his thumb, Raines broke into a dry laugh, and said,—

"See here, pardner, may my neck be twisted if

you haven't raised my curiosity. I want to see what sort of stuff is in you ; and, if you will let me, I will take you in hand and see you through if I never do see the back of my neck again."

Looking a moment into the honest, good-natured face, Stanley extended his hand and said, "I am yours to command."

"Holy Mother!" Raines exclaimed, squeezing the supple fingers, "you haven't hardened these knuckles against niggers' heads, that's certain."

"Oh no," Stanley replied, with an amused smile ; "I am on the St. Clair order."

"Haw, haw! Well, get you a nine-point saw, a steel square, a jack-plane, a rule, hammer, apron, and jumper, and be here at seven in the morning. I will furnish you with other tools as you need them."

"Very well, Mr. Raines, I will be on hand."

"And another thing: my name is John ; plain John Raines."

"All right, John. My name is Stanley, but Sam, Jack, Pete, or any other name I'll answer to."

"Haw, haw! you'll do. So long."

CHAPTER X.

IT would fill a volume to follow Stanley step by step as he explored the mysteries of carpentry ; to narrate the many difficulties which harassed him at first, and the mishaps which constantly attended him ; to explain why the hammer would mistake his finger for the nail, and give it a rap which would put it in mourning for a week ; why the saw, in defiance of his most earnest entreaties, would stubbornly refuse to follow the line ; why the braces and bits, the moment he laid hands upon them, would get disgracefully drunk, and bore cross-legged in the most absurd manner ; or why the foreman would invariably choose the time when Raines was absent to give him orders in his carpenter's jargon, which was about as lucid to Stanley as so much Comanche.

Fortunately, Raines had a large lot of doors and window-frames to make, and was thus enabled to keep Stanley pretty well under his own wing. Morning, noon, and night he taught Stanley the various cuts ; the secrets of the square ; how to

obtain the pitch of a roof; how to throw a building into squares in order to estimate the amount of lumber needed, etc., until Stanley became competent to build a house theoretically ere he could practically. He determined, however, to be worthy of so faithful a teacher, and, putting aside everything else, bent all the energies he possessed towards mastering the trade. He had a correct eye and a cunning hand, which are everything in mechanism, and ere long Raines passed from encouraging into praising and admiring his apt pupil. He concluded, a few days after Stanley began work, that he disliked his boarding-house, and engaged a room adjoining that of Stanley, eating his meals at the same restaurant, thus affording Stanley the opportunity of uninterruptedly pursuing his curriculum. And so faithfully did Raines discharge his duties as professor that Stanley began to catch himself mechanically mitring the bread, coping the beefsteaks, tracing panels in the butter, and drawing mansard-roofs in the mashed potatoes,—perhaps running carrots or some other long-limbed vegetable through them for purlines. His nights became haunted with bay-windows and hexagonal towers, which he was invariably climbing for some purpose, only to discover, after all, it was nothing more than the bed-

post. So persistently did this grow upon him that he became uneasy, and implored Raines to rest on his oars until the mechanic's fever had somewhat abated.

It is impossible for two persons to be constantly associated without each influencing the other to a greater or a less degree; and these two, so dissimilar and seemingly unsuited in every way, were of vast benefit to each other. Raines had spent his life, so far, in a happy-go-lucky style,—contented if he earned a full week's wages and could have an occasional night with the "boys," which meant a royal time, money all squandered, and a balloon-like head the following morning as a reminder of the joys that had flown. He had anticipated a glorious time initiating Stanley into the mysteries of the city by lamplight; but, on his proposition to "take in the town together" being met with a decided negative, he good-naturedly abandoned the enterprise and remained at home. He knew Stanley was fitted by birth and education to fill a higher station in life, and seeing how uncomplainingly he hid his feelings and pursued the present occupation as if his only aim in life was to succeed at carpentry caused a love of almost womanly tenderness to grow up in his big heart for the quiet, resolute young South-

erner, which determined him to abandon his own hitherto aimless ways and live in the future to some purpose ; while Stanley, feeling under lasting obligations to Raines, and respecting his many sterling qualities, subdued the irritation which the uncouth ways and rude familiarity of the latter occasioned at times, and exerted himself to make a pleasant companion. This brought its own reward, for it prevented his mind from dwelling too deeply on the past, and as his heart warmed more and more towards the frank, generous nature, his own caught a spark of the vigorous animal vivacity glowing in the bosom of the other.

After securing a borrower's card from the library, Stanley read aloud from the many volumes thus obtained, while Raines would sit listening for hours. Hearing an unusually thrilling romance one evening, Raines gave his leg a sounding slap, and said,—

“I never cared much for learning before, but twist my neck if I wouldn't give the wage of three years had I yours to-night !”

“It would not take long to acquire a taste for reading,” Stanley said, turning to him with a smile ; “and such an acquirement, or a wife who can manage you, is about all that will prevent you from running wild among your boon companions.”

“Haw, haw! Duke” (that was the name he had given Stanley). “When you begin to speak of a little wifey, your words tumble somersaults all over my heart.”

“You would like to own one, would you?”

“Now you’re shoutin’,” Raines exclaimed, spreading all over his chair. “If I had a little woman to make me stand around, I wouldn’t swap boots with the President. That arm,” he continued, extending the brawny limb, “looks big enough to care for a little darling, don’t it?”

“Yes,” Stanley answered, laughing; “and the first steady, domestic girl I find, I will try my hand at matchmaking.”

“Do it, Duke, and twist my neck if you ever regret it. Ah! how nice it would be if I had a wife and a cosey little home, just big enough for us three! She could fetch us our lunches at noon, have your slippers, books, and table ready for you at night; and, while you read to us, we could swap kisses on the sly. Ugh! it makes me lonesome to think of it.”

This counting him in with the simple details of his home touched Stanley deeper than the loudest protestations of friendship would have done; for it proved his welfare was unconsciously interwoven

with every impulse of the generous nature, and that it would count no happiness complete unless shared with him.

As Stanley became accustomed to the work, his mind, being no longer engrossed with the labor of learning, recoiled upon itself, and, after exhausting all the home resources, began making excursions into the past. On returning loaded with scenes of his youth as souvenirs of the trip, it would summon a conclave of its forces, and, laying those relics before the learned assembly, attempt to analyze and discover, if possible, what peculiar effect of climate, or convulsion of nature, caused their origin. But after acting as any body of lawyers, physicians, or theologians over a knotty problem, by disagreeing, and displaying a vast amount of erudition to no purpose, it, unlike the others, would give it up and fall back on the old but ever sad refrain, "It might have been." This madrigal, however, was often brought to an untimely end, and the professors turned ignominiously out of doors, by a rap of the hammer upon Stanley's finger or a glancing hatchet against his knee. Then red-hot anathemas would smash the chairs, overturn the tables, and go thumping around the room in which the thunders of debate had so lately reverberated.

He quickly discovered that he would be compelled to relinquish either his trade or such thoughts, as edged tools possess neither eyes nor conscience, though endowed with an inquiring turn of mind, which prompts them to explore your anatomy whenever the watchman Mind has his back turned. His feelings most enthusiastically prompted the former; but the ever troublesome bank account and memories of that dry old dirge, "Have you ever worked at this before?" made the latter victorious; so, tearing up the track which led into the past, he ditched the engines, discharged the engineers, and turned, reanimated and resolutely, again to his work. But, like the murderer who double locks and bars forty-nine doors and leaves the fiftieth standing open, he locked each door and sealed every crack facing the past, and left the window open to the mail-bag. Consequently, he was daily crucified afresh by receiving letters from his friends,—letters that came like invigorating breezes from his native hills, but, alas! reminded him of scenes over which he dared not dwell. The very gayety of some of these letters seemed an insult to his barren lot, as they questioned him about the country and himself, begging him to send them something as a souvenir of that land, such as a mountain, a volcano, a

gold-mine, anything that he could conveniently send by mail; but, with the usual perverseness of human nature, instead of closing the window, he threw it wider still by writing more and merrier letters in return,—letters with a tone of his old, careless self ringing through every line, while each syllable, as he penned it, seemed to mock him with the bitter contrast.

When a novelist is depicting a hero whom misfortune has dragged from his high estate down upon a level with the common herd, I believe the most approved style of procedure is to compel his associates to see the stamp of nobility upon the commanding, godlike brow, and to feel the intrinsic superiority shining from the unfathomable eyes: thus seeing and feeling, their little spirits sink upon trembling knees in order to be enabled to look up to the fallen unfortunate. But, as it is my wish to associate more closely with facts than with style, I am constrained to acknowledge, so far from Stanley's brother-workmen getting down to look up at his loveliness, they thought it was unaccountable why he was not overawed in their society, as they were finer mechanics, and, of course, in their own eyes, superior men. They also took umbrage because, while sitting around at noon eating their lunches,

he, far from being consumed with admiration of their vast intellects, ate his dinner and smoked his cigar with the utmost *sang-froid*, while they paraded their inexhaustible stores of wisdom in able discussion,—even preserving his composure while they cracked their wittiest jokes. This last was inexcusable, especially in one so young; and I fear, had not Raines (a prime favorite with them all) so strenuously defended him, the old, old dirge would have rung again in his ears. Had he been a block-head, they could have treated him with pitying contempt, and been at rest; but they knew he was not,—knew he could talk, and talk like a lawyer at that, when he felt so disposed; and why one possessing a glib tongue would not wag it was utterly incomprehensible. There he was, invariably courteous, obliging, unembarrassed, and coolly unconcerned about them and their affairs, and seeming to think they should be equally so about him and his. This, within itself, was sufficiently tantalizing; but, not content with that, he must add insult to injury by possessing such a confident bearing that it inspired them with visions of blackened eyes and broken heads, when they thought of assailing him with ridicule. The very acme of aggravation was reached at this point, and woe, woe, young man, if

you ever trip, for you will be buried beneath the torrents of their pent-up and rapidly-accumulating wrath.

To do the workmen justice, however, the majority of them were good, sensible fellows, possessing foibles, it is true, like all mankind ; but one forgot those while contemplating their many sterling qualities. They merely misunderstood Stanley. This, however, was not surprising, nor were they any more obtuse in that than he, for the misunderstanding was mutual ; so they concluded at last, if he chose to pursue a course contrary to their established rules of etiquette, the loss was his, and left him to entertain himself as he saw fit.

CHAPTER XI.

DEAR READER, have you ever been in California ? If not, seize the first opportunity which presents itself to visit that land of climate. Cross its burning deserts, idle among its redwood forests, feel its earthquake shocks, stand upon some lofty ridge with the dark heaving ocean stretching away to the

west, while tier on tier of rugged hills climbs to the skies on the east, and feel amply rewarded for your trouble. Then, having gazed your fill upon clustering towns and populous valleys, come with me to the Coast Range of mountains, where the princely residence of Colonel Ellswaith, seated upon its sunny slopes, overlooks the beautiful valley of Santa Clara. The building is a two-story frame, with verandas encircling both lower and upper stories; the rustic siding is painted a dazzling white, the window-blinds a deep green, while the railings, ceiling, and columns of the verandas are stained an oaken color. The grounds are a wilderness of artistically arranged shrubbery and flower-beds, while spire-like eucalyptes follow the gravelled drive, in serried ranks, to the valley beneath. The heights above the house are covered with vine-yards; the level land to the right is shadowed with orchard-trees of every variety; while to the left lies a wild, rocky gorge choked with chaparral and buttonwoods, and down which a mountain stream churns itself to foam in its haste to reach the valley beyond. Seated thus beneath vine-clad heights, with foliage-crowned hills to the right and to the left, and looking across earth's fairest valley to the shadowy outlines of mountains beyond, I defy the

famed travellers of our time to produce a spot where beauty and grandeur are more happily blended.

Colonel Ellswaith, having amassed a princely fortune in New York, became enamored of California's beautiful scenery and salubrious climate during his travels through that State; and, returning East, closed out his business, and transferred himself and millions to this beautiful spot, lavishing everything upon it which art could suggest or money obtain.

He was a tall, portly old gentleman, with none of that suspicious haughtiness in his genial nature which mars so many of our successful business men, but, having the blood of gentlemen in his veins, lived not in holy horror of contamination by contact with poorer and, of course, less blue-blooded unfortunates. His wife, however, being less fortunate in point of birth, and having his grand old name coupled with his unlimited wealth at her command, invariably surrounded herself with the most absolute *élite*; but, if the truth were known, I fear the old colonel, though standing somewhat in awe of his lady, had many a secret chuckle over the frantic efforts it cost this high-bred dame to shield her skirts from that great body of ought-to-be-hanged unwashed.

They were childless, and the only other occupant of the mountain home was Irene Ellswaith, the colonel's orphaned niece. She had arrived, six months before this chapter opens, from the East ; and, as a rich and beautiful young heiress is a great acquisition to any circle, East or West, there had been no dearth of amusement since her advent upon the scene. Those who had enjoyed the princely hospitality of her uncle before, now became 'all but intoxicated in the presence of so much wealth and sweetness, and the adulation which assailed her on every hand would have utterly demoralized one less evenly poised than herself.

Early left an orphan with an ample fortune of her own, Irene, regardless of conventionalities, had pursued the paths which suited her rare and vigorous intellect ; but society can allow great latitude to its reigning beauty, especially if that beauty is blessed with a goodly flock of the golden calves which the nineteenth-century sinners worship equally as ardently as the Israelites worshipped the golden calf of old.

Portray the slender throat, the shell-like ears, and delicate nostrils of this high-bred beauty faithfully as I may, the picture would yet be incomplete, for the subtle charm of her presence is wanting ; so let

the reader picture his or her ideal of a perfect woman and Irene Ellswaith will stand revealed.

There was one visitor at the mountain home who seemed destined to subdue the heart of the high-spirited Irene. This was a young man, Lawrence Hamilton by name, and Californian by birth, though his parents were Pennsylvanians. His father, in California parlance, was a forty-niner, and, "striking it rich" in the "gold diggings," had moved his family into a palatial residence, not exactly on, but near, Nob Hill in San Francisco. Here he now lived in almost princely splendor, only soiling his fingers by occasionally dabbling in mining stocks, etc. He and Colonel Ellswaith were warm personal friends, and had often discussed the desirability of "pooling" their vast fortunes by a union between son and niece: this accounted for young Hamilton's presence in Colonel Ellswaith's home.

As the shadows of evening crept out across the broad valley, and the slanting sunbeams began playing, like golden orioles, about the crests of the opposite mountains, Irene and Lawrence came out of the house and seated themselves upon the cool veranda.

"To look on that peaceful scene," Irene said, gazing out over the quiet valley, "brings to my

mind Mohammed's famous words, as he turned his back upon Damascus. It seems impossible that an unquiet feeling or an unworthy thought could be harbored in a spot so blessed by nature."

"If the hearts of its inhabitants were revealed to you now," he answered, "you would, I fear, be deplorably disillusionized." Then, seeing that his words grated on her ears, he continued: "It is a beautiful spot, and, though I never admired the country before, this trip has almost decided me to found a home in these parts that will rival your uncle's in beauty and elegance."

"After the new wore away," she replied, "you would surpass Shylock bemoaning your wasted ducats."

"I thought nature and the country were especial wards of yours."

"You and I are quite different personages," she answered, carelessly. "I do love pure, unadulterated nature; but for one like yourself, whose grandest sunset is the glitter of gold, whose favorite promenade is the crowded street, and whose music is the rush and roar of traffic, her secluded haunts would soon become insupportably dull. Do not wince," she continued, smiling at his slight grimace; "mine is not a partisan spirit which sees no good nor

beauty beyond its own circle of action and pleasures. It is your nature to love the world's pageantries, mine to love those of our common mother,—that is all."

"Thank you," he said, bowing with mock gravity; "I appreciate your liberality; but when you speak with such lofty scorn of the world's frivolities, the fear assails me that you intend eschewing them altogether. I hope you will cast a pitying veil over the features of your weak brother when they are distorted with longings after the flesh-pots of Egypt, and allow him to worship you from afar, on the day when, turning from those same vulgar flesh-pots, you immolate yourself upon some cherished altar. Which altar shall it be, woman's rights or——"

"Wax sarcastic much as you like," Irene interrupted, "but truth compels you to acknowledge it is the stupid selfishness of your brothers which is driving my sisters into this movement."

"Far be it from me to turn traitor to my brothers," Lawrence answered; "and even if I attempted to do so, like Balaam, the contrary would be forced from my lips when I looked abroad and realized that the ladies own this round globe entire, with my unhappy brothers for their ministers. Woman, seated upon the lofty pedestal of her own

sweet will, determines upon the ruin of a kingdom or the relief of a hovel ; and straightway the lords —lords, forsooth ! her thrice-fettered slaves—of the sterner (?) sex go meekly forth to do her bidding ; yet, O insatiable ambition ! the cry still rises for loftier pedestals, brighter sceptres, and more absolute sway. But believe me, Miss Ellswaith, the high-places of earth have been so thoroughly surrendered to you that you must conquer some other sphere before you can gain anything new. I thought, however," he continued, dropping his bantering tone, " that you, for one, were not in sympathy with this movement ?"

" You thought right," she answered ; " nor am I likely to uphold *all* this movement embraces while I can interpret my Bible."

" You relieve me ; but will you excuse me if I hint that you are behind the day ? The Bible theories have long been exploded and set aside."

" Even if that were true," she replied, pensively, " woman's position in life would still be unchanged."

" How so ?"

" Why, if Moses is discarded, Darwin takes his place," she answered ; " and whether or not my sex would be benefited by the transfer I will leave for others to watch the ways of nature's creatures and

decide. But let poor, grovelling minds claim descent from any source they please, or interpret the Scriptures as suits their mean conceptions best, the reverence due my Maker, and my duty towards the one who claims my hand, are as plain to my heart and mind as are the follies of our times."

The moon had ridden high in the clear heavens as they conversed, flooding all the scene with its golden beams; and as Irene sat with a light zephyr shawl caught carelessly about her queenly head, she presented such a rare, exquisite picture to her companion that all his caution and resolves were forgotten, and, catching up her hand, he said, in low, rapid tones,—

" You are right in that, as you are in everything, and you would make me the happiest man that moon is looking upon at this hour did you give me this hand and yield—"

" Sir," she said, drawing her hand away haughtily, " you forget yourself; I never dreamed of your taking advantage—"

" Excuse my abruptness," he interrupted, hurriedly; " but you surely have discovered ere this that I love you, and that the one hope of my life is to gain your love and win you for my wife."

" You honor me beyond my deserts," she an-

swered, coldly, "and I thank you for it; but what you ask can never be."

"Do not say that, Irene," he cried, in an agitated tone; "anything but that. Take weeks, months, years, to consider my offer, if your love is yet your own to give, and I will work for it as man never worked before."

As her ears detected the sharp pain in his voice, a softer light shone in Irene's dark eyes, and, giving him her hand, she said,—

"I do not bid you hope; but, as you have asked it, I will consider your offer, and will give you an answer one week from to-night."

"You render me happy by granting that much," he answered, bowing over her hand; "and, Miss Ellswaith, let the knowledge that the sunshine or shadow of my life is under consideration plead for me. I have much to offer you,—youth, wealth, and a spotless name; and if you will accept that name, I will build an elegant residence in these hills, so that you may reign queen alternately in my city home and in these your favorite haunts."

A shadow of disappointment usurped the soft light in her lustrous eyes as he closed this noble speech with an appeal to her cupidity, and, rising, she said,—

“I will remember all this, and let you know my decision. We must return now or the company will wonder at our prolonged absence.”

CHAPTER XII.

ONE of Stanley's brother-workmen was an old gentleman named McLeod, whose dry humor and shrewd, quaint sayings had often amused him during their very rare conversations. This old man was the proud possessor of a contented-looking wife and a buxom young daughter, who brought his lunches at noon, and sat beside him looking complacently on while he, with his broad face and high cheek-bones fairly beaming with good humor, swiftly demolished his meal.

A dull sense of his own selfish isolation would frequently trouble Stanley while lying around in the shavings watching this contented group. “I am a horny-handed son of toil,” he would muse bitterly, “and yet I deny myself a laborer's only solace. Look at that trio; they are brimming over with contentment. What more could life afford them ?

Are they not wiser than I? Yea, most assuredly. Then why continue thus, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up? Why not rid myself of an ambition which can yield me nothing but discontent, win the fair hand of some workman's daughter, and live so that mine old age will present to the world another such group as that?

“The daughter is finely formed, has a merry blue eye, and will settle into a cheerful old age like her mother; so why not win her guileless love, have her to fetch my lunches, brighten my home, and go with me down to a contented grave? Let me pluck aside the veil and glance across the crested waves of swiftly coming years to view the thrilling scene. Behold a neat little cottage with my sturdy Jean standing in the door, and rosy-cheeked children playing about the steps. Presently a manly stride is heard, and the father—that is, I, dressed in overalls and jumper, with pipe stuck in my mouth—comes swinging up the path. Hark! hear the joyous shout as the children toddle to meet him, the ‘envied kiss to share.’ There it is,—a pleasant home, a contented wife, healthy children, a laborer’s appetite, and a laborer’s rest. What more could the heart of workman desire? Ha, ha! why do you shrink from the inviting picture? Verily, verily, young

sir, you are difficult to please. Perhaps, in time, I could find me a green grocery ; then the very acme of mundane felicity would be gained. I could deal out parsnips, carrots, turnips, and smiles to my neighbors, receiving their pennies and floating gossip in exchange, until I became a mighty man in the community. Ah ! let me close my eyes and revel a while in the glorious vision. But perdition seize such mocking ! Would not baby fingers open my flinty heart to love, and exorcise the defiant devil in my nature ? Soft ! " he said, rising suddenly, " there is Raines ; manlike, I am forgetting the generous, whole-souled fellow in dreams of my own aggrandizment. But you shall have the bonny Jean, old boy, if I can pave the way ; so here goes."

Crossing to where the old man was sitting alone, his wife and daughter having returned home, Stanley seated himself opposite, and said,—

" Mr. McLeod, I have come to broach a strange subject, and I fear you will think too much *whiskey* hath made me mad ; but if I become entirely too audacious, you have my permission to bring me to order with the aid of one of the many boards lying around."

" All right ; heave to, my lad," the old man answered, laughing.

“You have a daughter, Mr. McLeod, who will marry some day, I suppose, and I——”

“Come, Duke!” the old man interrupted. “I have a daughter it is true, and that she will marry some day is also true,—in fact, I would not object to a sober, industrious lad courting her now; but if you were that lad I would tell you to look elsewhere.”

“Then you do not count me sober and industrious?” Stanley replied, with a quiet smile.

“You are sober and industrious, yes; but, quiet and seemingly contented as you are, I would as soon think of trusting the happiness of my child with a Comanche Indian as with one of your volcanic nature. Mate with your kind, Duke, mate with your kind. That’s my motto.”

“In other words,” Stanley replied, carelessly, “you would advise me to choose a red-hot terma-gant who could return a Roland for my Oliver or a rolling-pin for my boot-jack. But, as it was not for myself I was speaking, I will not challenge the correctness of your diagnosis. I was speaking for a friend of mine, McLeod, as you would have heard had you allowed me to proceed; and, as friends are rather scarce articles at my house at present, you know to whom I allude.”

“As to Raines,” the old man said, after a pause,

"I could find no objections. So, if he can win my daughter's consent, he will have mine."

"Good!" Stanley replied; "he and I will be at your house Sunday evening next."

"You will find us at home, and I want it understood that Raines must break this to Jean himself; in other words, must do his own courting."

"Very well," Stanley replied. "It will save embarrassment doubtless. But there goes the whistle."

As Stanley and Raines were returning home after work-hours, Raines slapped Stanley on the shoulder and said, "The boss received a note this morning from an old codger named Ellswaith, living out in the foot-hills, wanting him to send a man to do some work on his house; and the boss was about to refuse, as the last three men he sent came packing back in twenty-four hours mad enough to murder him for sending them; but I persuaded him to try you. So pack your duds and go down on the morning's express to-morrow."

"What was the trouble with the other men?" Stanley asked; "has he a weakness for setting bulldogs on workmen?"

"No; the old gentleman is polite as a Muscovy duck; it is the grand duchess, his lady, who kicks up the row. You see, they, and their house, are so

very fine that a common man must put on slippers before he is allowed into their presence and on the fine carpets. Besides, they will not allow us to sit at the same table, but send us to the kitchen with the Chinamen ; and, you know, California workmen are not the meek and lowly creatures that this lady is used to in the East."

"I suppose you think, as I am lately from the East, I will not object to dining with the Chinamen ?"

"Hang it, no ! of course you would object ; but, quiet as you are on that score, I know you are accustomed to such people, and thought, perhaps, you could manage to keep them in good humor until the work is finished."

"I will try at least," Stanley replied, "especially as I long to take a trip to the country. I would draw the line at eating with the Chinamen, but am willing to take my meals alone, in any decent place they choose to put them. But this interferes with an engagement I made with your prospective father-in-law."

"I saw you talking with old Mac," Raines said, his jolly face lighting up. "Did you feel of him any ?"

"He told me to tell you that when you get his daughter's consent you will have his."

“Oh, glory !” Raines cried, catching off his hat and executing a war-dance.

“Come on, man ; the police will run you in for a lunatic.”

“Let 'em run ! Let 'em run ! Duke, you're a brick ! Let me hug you, old fellow, just once.”

“Nonsense ! save that for the bonny Jean.”

Stanley regretted this retort the next moment ; for it caused Raines to cut an extra pigeon-wing and wind up his absurdities by embracing a lamp-post.

“Duke,” he said, overtaking Stanley, who had walked on and left him, “tell me all he said.”

“I will when I get you off the street.”

“Haw, haw, haw !”

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR one sick of the city and its bustle, the short run down the Southern Pacific Railroad and the horseback-ride across a beautiful valley in the early morning were a treat indeed ; and all too soon Stanley began ascending the foot-hills to Colonel Ells-waith's home.

To the servant who answered the bell and bowed him into the parlor Stanley said, "Tell Colonel Ellswaith the carpenter has arrived, and he will understand."

In a few moments the colonel entered, with a puzzled look on his face, and said, as Stanley rose to meet him,—

"Good-morning, Mr. Carpenter. Keep your seat, sir, keep your seat."

"Excuse me, sir," Stanley replied, "but my name is Huntingdon,—Stanley Huntingdon."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Huntingdon. My servant misunderstood the name."

"I told him to inform you that the carpenter had arrived."

"The carpenter? What carpenter?"

"Am I not addressing Colonel Ellswaith?"

"That is my name; you are, sir."

"Did you not write to the city for a workman to do some necessary repairing about your house?"

"I did, sir; yes."

"Then I am at your service, sir."

"What! you a workman!" the colonel cried, looking at him in astonishment.

"I am, sir, and a good one, as I hope to prove."

The colonel looked at him a few moments in

silence, then, rising, paced back and forth across the room, chuckling all the while to himself. After a few minutes spent thus he halted before Stanley and said,—

“Mr. Huntingdon, you have it in your power to render me a great favor.”

“Then command me,” Stanley replied, courteously.

“Will you conceal the business which brought you here, and remain until to-morrow as my guest?”

“Why do you wish this masquerade?” Stanley asked, looking at him in surprise.

“Well, sir, you see my wife has peculiar ideas concerning workmen, and the masses generally, and —hem!—so——”

“And so you wish to exhibit a specimen under the most favorable auspices? But you must excuse me, sir, if I refuse to figure as that specimen,” Stanley interrupted, his cheeks paling with wrath.

As the low, cutting tones fell upon the colonel’s ear, he looked more keenly at Stanley; then, offering him his hand, said,—

“Mr. Huntingdon, let my gray hairs inspire you with sufficient confidence to believe I will place you in no position likely to wound your feelings. I ask you, as one gentleman asks another, to remain my guest to-day; and, as there is more in this than you

can see, I confidently trust that you will lay aside all scruples and gratify my whim."

"I will bear out any rôle you assign to me," Stanley replied, after a short pause, which he had given to consideration.

"You make me your debtor," the colonel said, warmly. "But time presses. What State are you from? Mississippi? Good! the rôle is easy. You are a young Southerner looking at the country, which—ha, ha!—is the truth. Excuse me a few minutes, and make yourself at home till I return. I suppose you wish your horse returned to town? yes?" Thanking him again, the colonel hurried out.

The parlor in which Stanley found himself was a large, airy, richly-furnished apartment, connected with a sitting-room by heavy folding-doors, which were standing open.

After noting this, Stanley crossed to a large, mullioned window, and was gazing moodily out over the valley, when the low notes of an organ stole in from the sitting-room.

He half turned as the familiar prelude stole over his hushed spirit, and the next moment was rooted to the spot as a rich, sweet voice took up the song,—

“A hundred months have passed, Lorena,
 Since last I held that hand in mine,
 And felt the pulse beat fast, Lorena,
 Tho’ mine beat faster far than thine.
 A hundred months: ’twas flowery May,
 When up the hilly slope we climbed
 To watch the dying of the day
 And hear the distant church-bells chime.

“We loved each other then, Lorena,
 More than we ever dared to tell;
 And what we might have been, Lorena,
 Had but our loving prospered well—
 But there! ’tis past,—the years are gone:
 I’ll not call up their shadowy forms;
 I’ll say to them, ‘Lost years, sleep on,
 Sleep on, nor heed life’s pelting storms.’

“It matters little now, Lorena;
 The past—is in the eternal past;
 Our heads will soon lie low, Lorena,
 Life’s tide is ebbing out so fast.
 There is a future, oh, thank God!
 Of life this is so small a part;
 ’Tis dust to dust beneath the sod,
 But there, up there, ’tis heart to heart.”

The voice of the singer gained volume and power as the song proceeded, until the rich melody pulsed through all the room; and as Stanley stood, dazed, entranced, it seemed that his spirit was caught up

and borne on the wings of song back through the lapse of years; and there, ah! there he saw a shady woodland, felt its breezes upon his cheeks, saw a fresh-faced youth stretched upon a mossy bank, and heard the voice of another singer. Like a blaze of lightning those simple words, "If it were ever otherwise, I would wish to go there, up there, where 'tis heart to heart," darted through his brain, and his soul sickened with despair as he realized her wish had been granted and that this song was but the echo of his own wasted years.

As he stood with clinched hands and livid lips, battling with the fierce tides of awakening recollections, a softer prelude began stealing over his fighting spirit as the same voice, with perhaps a suspicion of tears in the soft tones, commenced the following lines :

" What tho' clouds are hovering o'er me, and I seem to walk
alone,

Longing 'mid my cares and crosses for the joys that long
have blown ?

If I've Jesus, Jesus only, then my sky will have a gem ;
He's a Sun of brightest splendor, and the Star of Bethlehem.

" What tho' all my earthly journey bringeth naught but
weary hours,

And in grasping for life's roses thorns I find instead of
flowers ?

If I've Jesus, Jesus only, I possess a cluster rare ;
He's the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon fair.

“ What tho' all my heart is yearning for the loved of long
ago,

Bitter lessons sadly learning from the shadowy page of
woe ?

If I've Jesus, Jesus only, He'll be with me to the end,
And unseen by mortal vision angel bands will o'er me
bend.”

When embittered and disappointed in early years, we impatiently turn from the innocent joys and aspirations of our youth, and press onward in the paths of sin, crushing every emotion, every remonstrance of conscience which ruffles the careless tenor of our way, until the past stretches out a weird waste of shadowy phantoms and unrealized dreams ; but when it seems that we have bidden farewell to those fading phantoms forever, something—a look, a tone, or a smile—disturbs the silent forms, starting them into life, and giving them a “ local habitation and a name ;” and as they extend their ghost-like arms with mournful emphasis towards the handwriting blazing along the walls of our present, we discover the worth of that which we have turned away, and realize the hollowness of all we have retained. Thus it proved with Stanley ; and had not

those soothing words, "If I've Jesus, Jesus only," been ringing in his heart, the mocking demon of his nature would have prompted him to strangle the rising thoughts with a ruthless hand and mutter, "'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin;' so be it. No one will welcome the division of my kingdom more heartily than I." But what sin-sick wretch could be deaf to words of such sweet promise? And as the soft tones of the singer thrilled through his bosom, a mist came before his eyes, a softer look stole over his handsome, defiant features, and, turning to the window, where he could see the mist rolling away from the valley before the rays of the approaching sun, he murmured,—

"Almighty Father, Ruler of heaven and earth, on every hand I see Thy noble handiwork; and while my heart wanders amid Thy grand creations, it bows in humbleness before Thine awful throne, but resumes its dark rebellings the moment it re-enters this embittered bosom. What I am, what is to be my destiny, and how I am to serve Thee, I know not, for all is darkness here; but, ah! I do know something whispers now of a fuller life upon some brighter sphere; and if, O my Father, my past has not exiled me from Thee, let the shadows drift away from my soul, even as the mist from out

that vale, and let Thy glory, as a token to me, glance but once into this desponding bosom.” Ah! what is it that strikes him to his knees as a look of almost unearthly radiance overspreads his upturned face?

So engrossed was he that he failed to hear the rustle of silks as a beautiful dark-eyed girl came swiftly from the adjoining room and knelt by his side. He felt her presence, however; for, extending his hand as she knelt, he gazed a few moments longer across the distant mountains, then, turning to her, said,—

“It is gone; but the radiance it has left behind will light me home. Ah! maiden, did your spirit never peep into the glorious Beyond?”

Then, remembering his surroundings, he rose and lifted her from her knees as he asked if she were the singer.

“I am,” she answered, as their eyes met in a long, rapturous look, “and I saw you in a mirror which reflects this window when— But I hear my uncle coming,” she said, hurriedly. “I will see you later in the day. Compose yourself.” And, turning, she passed through the folding-doors of the adjoining room.

Stanley stood looking after her until the parlor

door opened, admitting the colonel ; then, collecting himself with a strong effort, he listened to the old gentleman's injunctions until the servant came to conduct him to his room.

Descending to the parlor three hours later, Stanley found three young ladies and two young men assembled, waiting the summons to dinner ; and a dark flush dyed his face as he discovered in Irene Ellswaith the young lady who had knelt by his side a few hours before. Controlling himself instantly, he returned her courteous greeting, and was presented to the other guests in turn. The last one to whom he was introduced was a pretty little blonde, who seemed determined to make him confess some horribly romantic secret concerning his Southern brothers. After rattling on a few minutes, she dropped her voice into low, confidential tones and said,—

“Now, Mr. Huntingdon, haven’t you slaves hid out down there yet?”

“Hundreds of them,” Stanley replied, soberly ; “but Vice is their master, and they are willing bondsmen.”

“Oh, but I mean real slaves,—negroes. Now confess.”

“Much as I would like to gain importance in

your eyes by disclosing some appalling secret," Stanley replied, smiling down into her mischievous face, "truth compels me to acknowledge that, like the mastodon, the genuine slave is no more."

"How shocking!" she said, with a pretty pout; "you are dispelling all my romantic ideas. I never think of the South without seeing cypress swamps, dark lagoons, and runaway negroes."

"Nothing very romantic about those," he answered; "the swamps and lagoons breed alligators, mosquitoes, agues, and other disguised blessings, while the sheriff has usurped the office of the master and his dogs; so——"

"I won't hear another word, sir!" she cried, putting her little hands over her ears.

"I dislike to rouse you from even one of your pretty illusions," Stanley continued, rising to escort her out to dinner, "but I wish to disabuse your mind of the thought that we Southerners live in a roseate dream of bliss. It was sufficiently dull down there when we could chase a runaway darkey occasionally, but since your people have declared that to be an unparliamentary amusement it is stupid indeed."

"Did you ever chase a darkey?" she asked, turning to him with beaming eyes.

"Dozens of them; but 'twas away from my corn-crib and chicken-roost."

"Hateful! I won't speak to you again for a week."

Seating themselves around the table, the company began a lengthened disquisition upon that ever-interesting subject, the weather; and after discussing its past blessings, present prospects, and future contingencies, they were rapidly drifting upon society topics, when Lawrence Hamilton veered clear of that dangerous channel by asking Stanley about the literature of the South, its taste, progress, etc.

As he answered this question to the best of his ability, and ably bore his share of the conversation while both modern and ancient literature passed in rapid review, Stanley detected more than one look of astonishment proceeding from the old colonel's chair; and it was with difficulty he prevented his secret amusement from becoming visible.

After assisting in completing the hasty survey of those vast fields, Stanley turned with some courteous remark to his hostess; and, as he noted the frigid smile playing serenely over the proud, haughty features, a cold wave trembled along his spine, while he "bitterly thought of the morrow." She was surprisingly affable to the *rich* young Southerner,

and entertained him with an endless history of the accomplishments of numerous members of her set, all of which was, of course, excruciatingly interesting to Stanley.

When they adjourned to the parlor, Stanley sought Irene's side. She was standing alone by a bay-window, looking out over the valley.

"I judge that Miss Ellswaith is something of a stranger here, from her rapt interest in the surrounding scenery." he said, pausing at her side.

"I fear you fail to appreciate its beauties," she answered, turning her dark eyes upon him.

"On the contrary," he responded, "I think the man who chose this site possessed the heart and eye of a poet. And, standing here looking out over that unrivalled scene, I feel as I imagine Mohammed felt when he turned his back upon Damascus."

"You are but echoing my own words," she said, with a rare, sweet smile, "and you cannot conceive the pleasure it affords me to meet one who sympathizes with my hobby."

"The pleasure is mutual, I assure you," he responded; "for I can safely say in all my life I have never met more than six persons who would not glance casually at the most gorgeous sunset and ask why I was not at Mrs. Richlady's ball or the

last horse-race, or who, under cover of the grandest music, would not ask if I knew that fright of a girl or that fussy old gentleman, etc."

"I have often noticed the same," Irene said, laughing, "but suppose it is nothing more than we should expect. I hope," she continued, "these scenes will not arouse in you the same regrets which fill my bosom at times."

"The only regret likely to assail me is the thought that I cannot live and die here," he said, with a smile.

"That is a regret indeed," she said, gently; "but that to which I alluded is, while wandering among these hills I feel as if I would give worlds, were they mine to bestow, could I embody into verse the ideas which their grandeur suggests."

"Perhaps you possess the gift without being aware of doing so."

"Alas! no; the enthusiasm is mine, but not the ability."

"The artist who drew that picture," Stanley said, looking at a large drawing above, "possessed both the ability and the enthusiasm. What could be more natural than that wild, rocky gorge, those foaming falls and distant cloud-capt peaks? The artist seemed to catch the very air and throw it

over the scene; soft and slumberous, like the shadowy mantle of an Indian summer."

"I am glad it pleases you," she said, with a bright smile, "for the work is mine; and some day, if you remain here, I will show you the identical spot."

"Thanks! I will be glad to accompany you," Stanley said, a strange smile hovering about his lips. "Will you pardon me if I say I think Miss Ellswaith is a very ambitious young lady indeed? A master-hand with the brush, the queen of song, yet sighing for other gifts."

The rich color fluttered up into her cheeks at this graceful compliment, and their eyes met again. What Stanley saw there made the past and the future all one to him; he lived but for the present, and that was enough; he saw nothing but the proud, beautiful spirit mirrored in the dusky depths of her brilliant eyes, and felt nothing but the subtle charm of her presence. It was a dangerous hour; but as his pulse began responding to the seductive influence, his barren lot leered at him over her shoulder, sweeping the sweet sensations from his bosom, and filling him with an almost irresistible desire to break out into bitter mockery. Fortunately, before he could open his lips Colonel

Ellswaith called to them, and, turning to him, they descended to earth.

We will not analyze Irene's feelings as she mingled with the company, listening to Stanley's gay repartee and light laughter. He talked Southern fashions with his hostess, defined the South's business future with his host, upheld its political dogmas against Lawrence Hamilton, and talked nonsense to the pretty little blonde; but to Irene's delicately attuned ears it seemed that a ring of bitter mockery thrilled through his pleasantest words. She caught his eye while singing Longfellow's grand old song, "The Bridge," and felt, she knew not why, that his spirit was up in arms, that the demon of unrest was abroad in his bosom; and a dull, undefined pain began to stir in her own. She sighed with relief on gaining the solitude of her chamber, but his look as he stood that morning fighting with overwhelming memories haunted her still; and as her mind vainly conjectured the cause of his emotion, her heart, all unknown to herself, was casting a soft halo about this stranger and placing him upon its holiest altar. His soft, faintly mocking tones haunted her slumbers, and she knelt again by his side in her dreams; but when she would have taken his hand, he turned to her with such a malig-

nant smile that she shrank away appalled with fear. Then, it seemed, she was walking alone upon a wild, rocky cliff, with huge billows bellowing around its base, while through the driving mist and darkness she saw his form towering upon the very verge of the giddy height. She sprang forward and seized his arm as he was casting a farewell look on earth and sky, but, turning on her with a black scowl that paralyzed her with fear, he broke into wild, mocking laughter and sprang to his death.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE will pass swiftly over the events of the following day. Colonel Ellswaith drew Irene aside when she descended to breakfast, and, informing her of Stanley's position, explained the motives which prompted him to introduce Stanley as his guest. He finished by saying, "I thought he was an unusually handsome and gentlemanly-looking workman, and wished to bring your aunt into unprejudiced contact with him. I never dreamed of his being an educated gentleman, or I would not have

insulted him with the proposition. But I did so, and deserve the contempt which I know caused him to cloak his feelings and accede to my request. It has accomplished some good, however, for your aunt, on learning the truth, agreed to receive him at the table. She, of course, in her well-bred way, will crucify him on every occasion, but that must be borne."

What that day cost Irene no one ever knew. She watched Stanley with painful solicitude when he came in to dinner; but when she saw him coolly return the nods of their guests, meet her aunt's awful look unabashed, and begin his meal in a purely business-like manner, her relief knew no bounds. A loving woman is a mysterious anomaly; she can forgive the man of her choice almost any crime, and love him the better for his weakness; but let him once be the recipient of pity, contempt, or ridicule, and the love which would brave the terrors of eternity for his sake will fall dead at his feet. It is a knowledge of this fact which nerves many an unredeemable villain to die grandly. Had Stanley appeared confused and made himself ridiculous in his awkward position, Irene would have turned from him with contempt; but when she saw him rise proudly above himself and his surroundings, her

spirit acknowledged its master and placed him upon a throne which no misfortune could assail.

After finishing his day's work, Stanley lighted a cigar and wandered off over the hills. Discovering a narrow path which led southward, he followed it, lost in meditation, until an abrupt, crescent-shaped ridge barred his further progress. Ascending this, he stood admiring the glorious prospect thus afforded. The Santa Clara valley, bathed in moonlight, rolled off to the east and to the south on his left; the silent hills, ranging along the west, towered darkly above on his right; while immediately at the base of the ridge on which he stood sat a low, rambling adobe house embowered in luxuriant foliage, and surrounded by vineyards, orchards, and broad rolling wheat-fields. Watching the lights streaming from the windows, and glancing through the interlacing branches of the trees above, he then slowly descended the ridge, and, finding an open gate which led into a gravelled drive, wandered aimlessly on, admiring the well-kept grounds, until a bend in the drive revealed the brilliantly-lighted building. He heard footsteps approaching from a side-path, and paused as three men, issuing from the dark avenue, stood before him in the bright moonlight. He merely glanced at the two whose features and dress

proclaimed them Mexican menials ; but his eyes became riveted upon the stately form of the third. This was a man more than sixty years of age, but whose splendidly-proportioned form, as he stood with a rich Spanish cloak hanging carelessly from his massive shoulders, looked the very perfection of vigorous manhood. His long, luxuriant, dead-white hair formed a strange contrast to the heavy, iron-gray moustache and dark, rugged features ; while the bold, restless black eyes, raying out a baleful light as they scanned Stanley from head to foot, completed the incongruous picture.

“ What brought you here, sir ? ” he said, a dark scowl lowering his brows as he addressed Stanley.

“ Idleness,” Stanley answered, courteously. “ I was standing on that ridge, and the beauty of your grounds tempted me hither.”

“ Who are you ? ”

“ A gentleman,” Stanley responded, laconically, irritated by the brusque questions.

“ A gentleman, eh ? ” the other repeated, fiercely. “ Well, Mr. Gentleman, know that you stand before a man who hates the very sight of your accursed race, and who advises you, if you wish to bear a whole carcass hence, to hasten your departure.”

“ I will leave your premises,” Stanley said, paling

with wrath, "not that I fear your threat, but to rid myself of such an unmannerly cur."

The other seemed to be choking with rage and astonishment at this unexpected answer; but as Stanley was turning slowly away he broke into a loud roar of laughter, and said,—

"Stop, young man; by the blood of the Blessed Mary, I relish your pluck. Who the seven devils are you?"

"My name is Huntingdon," Stanley said, pausing.

"What!" the old man exclaimed, a look of surprise sweeping the habitual scowl from his face. "Ah! I see the likeness now, and should have known at first that no one but the son of Lewis Huntingdon would dare to answer me thus."

"Did you know my father?" Stanley asked, looking at him in surprise.

"Ay! and he is the only one of your reptile race who ought not to be steaming in sheol's hottest caldron at this moment. Where are you stopping now?"

"I am working for Colonel Ellswaith."

"Indeed! And how long since the Huntingdons condescended to work? But let that pass," he continued, seeing Stanley's brow darken at the jeering question. "When you return, Colonel Ellswaith

will inform you that I am a Spaniard of a not very odorous reputation, and if he is fond of his workman he will advise you to give my house a wide berth; but if you will discard all fear and claim my hospitality, I promise you,—ha, ha!—on the honor of a Spanish gentleman, that I will not have you assassinated."

"I can trust my precious life in your keeping," Stanley answered, a bitter sneer curling his lips, "as you could not render me a greater service than to rid me of it."

A gentler look softened the harsh features of the old man as he looked into the handsome, reckless face of the younger, but, turning away, he said, brusquely,—

"Well, restrain your curiosity and questions until day after to-morrow night; then walk over here, and I will see how near you have followed the steps of your father."

Leaving Stanley standing in the road, the old man strode off to the house, followed by his two servants.

CHAPTER XV.

THE night subsequent to the events narrated in the preceding chapter, Stanley lighted a cigar and, seating himself upon the upper veranda of Colonel Ellswaith's house, began meditating over his adventure with the Spaniard; but ere his cigar was half consumed he was disturbed by approaching footsteps. Turning, he saw Irene Ellswaith and Lawrence Hamilton coming through the hall, and thinking they, perhaps, were seeking a private retreat, he was rising to vacate the spot, when Lawrence said,—

“Keep your seat, Mr. Huntingdon; we came up specially to talk with you.”

Seating themselves in arm-chairs facing Stanley, Lawrence then said, “I hope you will excuse this intrusion, and pardon us if we seem impertinent; but, not having had an opportunity lately to converse with a gentleman recently from the South, we have come trusting that you will satisfy a long-gnawing curiosity about several questions pertaining to that district.”

"Though sadly deficient in knowledge concerning both my country and people," Stanley said, courteously, "I will yet cheerfully impart what little I do possess."

"Then," Lawrence said, with a bow and smile, "I would like, first of all, to hear your ideas concerning secession."

Seeing Stanley frown with annoyance at the question, Irene said, "Time, place, and circumstances favor philosophical discussion; the air is balmy, the moon unrolls charming pictures at our feet, and I grant to you gentlemen the privilege of smoking cigars *ad libitum*; so, suppose we imagine ourselves Roman triumvirs regulating the dynasties of earth?"

"In that case we must exchange pledges of good faith," Stanley answered, with a smile.

"True," Irene responded; "and instead of yielding brothers and uncles as sacrificial hostages, we will each crucify his self-love on the altar of General Good; thus allowing each to unbosom his darkest passions without fear of consequences. You, Mr. Huntingdon, are Mark Antony; please take the floor."

"Then, beloved colleagues, and co-sharers of my kingdom, I will answer the question propounded

by saying, did I intimate the South was wrong to secede you would dub me a hypocrite, and did I say she was right you would damn me as a traitor; so we will waive the question altogether. I am fully aware of the fact that you wish to hear of the South generally, and the negro particularly; and as I have been granted free speech, I will avail myself of the generous privilege to speak what is seldom heard, the truth, allowing you, of course, to pass as many strictures upon it as you please. Argument is a dangerous thing, as I have learned by sad experience. While living among my own people I was rather noted for the laxity of my brotherly love; but since forced to defend my brothers so often and so strenuously in this State, I have conceived a violent passion for them, and am thrice the rebel now that I was twelve months ago. Bearing in mind, then, that I am in love, and that love is blind, and remembering that you two, like the majority of your people, are so badly bitten by negropholism that it would require a mad-stone larger than this round earth to extract the poison, the questions naturally occur to my mind, ' Why harrow one another's souls with mutual recriminations? Why strengthen one another in strongholds of blindness and absurdity by closing the gates and

mounting the cannons with wordy warfare, when if peace were allowed to brood over the forts the gates would hang carelessly ajar, and thus allow meek-eyed Truth the opportunity of sneaking in unobserved? Look at the matter thus: you two have travelled through the South, you say. Did you not make the journey as did Grimes through Palestine, bearing in lieu of Grimes's pistol 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' in one hand and a handkerchief in the other? 'Perhaps so?' Well, then you saw matters in their proper colors, doubtless; and now you meet with one who is saturated with race prejudices, blinded by mistaken patriotism, and, of course, foolish enough to disagree with you; so, why waste precious moments waging fruitless warfare? However, I will not allow you the opportunity, but will make a few conjectures, and let Miss Ellswaith ascend the rostrum.

"In the first place, I wonder if there lives a metaphysician sufficiently profound or astute to explore the Caucasian mind and discover the source from whence this sentimental spoondrift of negropholism so persistently exhales; and why the aforesaid spoondrift prefers black to any other color. If so, and he will make himself known, I will speak to him in the beautiful language of Ruth. For, until

I am enlightened on that head, the horrible suspicion will haunt my mind that Noah missed the combination and gave to Canaan a blessing instead of a curse.

“In the next place, I wonder if the Northern gentlemen, who appeared so wonderfully surprised because they were whipped and hanged for endeavoring, before the war, to overturn the South’s ‘sacred’ institutions, ever dreamed that the men who whipped and hanged them were as yet uneducated in abolition sentiment, and looked upon them as extraordinary ‘cranks’ whom all sober citizens should endeavor to annihilate.

“And again, I wonder, if John Brown walked with God (as an eminent divine asserts), if God did not get into some decidedly queer paths during the aforesaid Brown’s carnival of blood and theft in Kansas and elsewhere.

“I also wonder if the people will ever realize that when our purses and lives are in jeopardy, we turn Samsons, steal Diogenes’s shoes, and, in lieu of more profitable sport, trot off with Gaza’s gates hanging about our foolish necks; and I wonder had New England been in the shoes of the South, would she, the land of boasted free speech, have sustained her reputation.

“I wonder if any philosopher will ever linger around the tombs of Socrates and our Saviour, analyze the conflicting causes that hurried them to their death, and then turn the light thus gained upon his patriotic contemporaries.

“I wonder if the Rt. Rev. T. U. Dudley understands human nature, and realizes that no one but his God can persist in striving with those who continue to turn away with blasphemy and rebellion,—if so, I wonder why he wrote ‘How shall we Help the Negro?’*

“I wonder if he realizes that the South has taxed her poverty to educate the negro; opened every avenue to wealth, and bidden him ‘God-speed’ on his journey, while she reserves the right to give that ‘patient, gentle, loving, individual aid’ to the multiplied, benighted, and suffering loved ones of her own flesh and blood, in whose bosoms lurk the glorious germs of Clays, Calhouns, and Augusta Evans.

“I wonder if he realized how odd that negro appeal for manly recognition sounded at the close of his dark picture of their loathsome degradation. I wonder if he did not fear some one would reply

* *Century Magazine*, June, 1885.

by informing the negro that, when he revarnished some of that 'grotesque ugliness' which his moral biographer so graphically portrayed, we could look at him without making wry faces; that, when he made himself a man, we would regard him as such; that, if he could not do so without our aid, he must confess his weakness and meet us half-way.

"I wonder if that sage proverb, 'The negro was degraded by slavery,' will not melt before Mr. Cable's, 'He was brought to our shores a naked, unclean, brutish, pagan savage.'* (I tell you slavery would have had to get up before day to sink him lower than that.)

"I wonder what Mr. Cable means by this, 'Examine it! It (the law) proffers the Freedman a certain security of life and property, and then holds the respect of the community, that dearest of all earthly boons, beyond his attainment. It gives him certain guarantees against thieves and robbers, and then holds him under the unearned contumely of the mass of good men and women.' I wonder what laws have to do with the respect of a community, or how constitutions can control the contumely of good men and women.

* *Century Magazine*, January, 1885.

“I wonder if Mr. Cable knows that a virtuous and intelligent negro holds the respect of his white acquaintances; but that, on going abroad, strangers recognize in him nothing save his being a member of an ignorant and lascivious race; and I wonder if he could discover an explanation for this, by watching his lady acquaintances draw aside their skirts on meeting an unfortunate sister, even extending their contumely to the female members of her family, how pure and virtuous soever they may be.

“I wonder if he did not smile in his sleeve while penning that beautifully poetic but intensely baseless soliloquy over the Birmingham, Alabama, iron-workers.*

“I wonder why John Bull, while contentedly sitting down on Paddy and Tippo Sahib, yearned so tenderly over the American slave.

“And I wonder if the South will have a respite when the mutterings of hungry millions assail the sentimentalists of the North; and I wonder if the negro won’t fare about as well during that respite as now.

“And I wonder what you two think of this bundle of wonders.”

* *Century Magazine*, September, 1885.

"Barring five-fifths of it," Irene said, laughing, "the remainder is subtle, far-reaching, magnificent, and sublime."

"And I think," Lawrence added, "to disrobe it of rhetoric and ill nature, there would be but one idea left, and that one could not stand alone long enough to condemn itself."

"This is refreshing," Stanley said, laughing. "What a lovely world this would be if we were always equally as candid! You spoke of philosophic discussion just now," he continued, lighting a cigar and turning to Irene. "You behold in me an unsettled humanitarian philosopher. I have looked the masses of mankind up one side and down the other, and, candidly, I don't know what to do with them. To get them to see alike is impossible; and to expect them to attain simon-pure contentment is out of the question. So, to a philanthropist, who wishes to see them permanently established upon moral and financial rising ground, it is discouraging and tantalizing to witness their ceaseless rising and falling along the scale of humanity. History abundantly proves they can be ground down until they will lick the feet of their oppressors, and be thankful they are allowed to live; or they can be pampered until they would be dissat-

isfied did their masters become their slaves; that small favors are great blessings, while great ones are unknown; that great favors are small blessings when small ones are unknown; in other words, did we reverse the natural order of things and elevate the bottom rail to the top, we would but widen the sphere of its discontent; so the question which naturally presents itself is, why not sink them low as decency will allow and let a few philosophers, like myself, for instance, run matters here altogether?"

"That is the most sublimely heartless course of reasoning it has ever been my good fortune to hear," Irene replied, "and every way worthy the feudal ages from whence you drew it. But, Mr. Huntingdon," she continued, looking curiously at Stanley, "you are such a strange man that it is hard to decide when you are sneering, jeering, or talking soberly; and I, for one, would like to hear you speak out honestly and earnestly, just for a change, if for nothing else."

"To speak plainly and soberly is like requesting the enemy to inspect the strength of your forts," Stanley replied, with a smile. "I acknowledge," he continued, "that, while watching the cradle rocking by the grave, and tracing the stupendous follies we

manage to commit during our lightning-like transit from the one to the other ; that, while watching the alternate slumberings of the lamb and the tiger in our bosoms ; that, in following the slow and painful ascent of some nation to a proud eminence, only to watch it roll to oblivion down the opposite side ; that, on realizing the instability of earthly affairs by witnessing this vast and bewildering mental, moral, and religious cotillion of ours,—I acknowledge, I say, my proneness to turn away with a pain in my heart and a jeer on my lips.

“ There are, however, some few rays that prevent the lone occupant of Pandora’s box from despairing altogether. The Printing-Press, the savior of our present and the guardian angel of our future, overshadows the world with a hope. The churches may wax ambitious, politics become hopelessly corrupt, labor leagues forget their missions, and out of the hideous pandemonium thus ordained another Augustus or Gregory may threaten this fair realm with the curse of his presence ; but the applauding senates will be silenced, the victorious legions melt from his side, and he will fly in ignominious disgrace before the roar of a united nation as those subtile aruspices, our editors, remembering their high calling, plunge their hands into the bowels of

the past and, drawing forth the dread auguries, turn them upon a gazing people.

“ The iron age is no more, the requiem has been sung above the prostrate fanatic and stupidly-superstitious bigot, the blazing libraries of Alexandria can no longer intimidate us, and, cradled between her protecting seas, Columbia, queen of nations, rising, phoenix-like, again and again from the débris of her own mistakes, will lead an admiring world to that summit of excellence where man, striking hands with the bending angels, can join in the grand and universal pæan, which, swelling from centre to circumference of this trembling earth, will roll up through the ether, startling distant worlds with, ‘ The victory is gained. God ever blest.’ My country! who, while viewing the lofty, liberal intellects dominating thy fair realm, can close his eyes upon the grand histories and Iliads destined to supply future ages with light, strength, and wisdom? Who, while noting the innate nobility of thy sons and the purity of thy daughters, can resist the impulse of rising on the wings of prophecy, when attempting to portray thy glorious and all-conquering future?”

Thus had Stanley rambled on for an hour, ably convincing his hearers that his mind refused a

steady, honest belief in anything ; that something in the past had turned his own hopes and aspirations to Dead Sea apples on his lips, and thus colored all his conclusions concerning the vast problems which he studied ; that his mind had become so hopelessly poisoned while studying the follies and mistakes of the world's past, that it was incapable of enjoying a healthy hope concerning its future ; but when his cheeks flushed and his tones thrilled with emotion as he spoke of his country's coming grandeur, Irene recognized his position, and holding out her hand as he concluded, she said,—

“ I thank you, Mr. Huntingdon, for speaking as you did. I realize now that intellect is the only shrine at which you worship ; and, as you find those shrines so few and far between, and see their oracles heedlessly neglected by the masses, you are thinking of throwing the whole world over with contempt. I had almost given you up while listening to you dash the most serious questions with burlesque ; but now, since discovering you are the blindest fanatic of all in your own peculiar line, I entertain some hope for you. I know you think the intelligence of the North, and of the world, has wronged and is wronging the conscience and intelligence of the South, and pride in and reverence for this wide-

spread republic is all that hushes your murmurings. Why, my dear sir, you are blinder than the very masses at which you so mercilessly sneer. Because, forsooth ! the masses think no good can come out of Nazareth, and hold all manner of absurd opinions concerning your countrymen, you, the boasted philosopher, must quiver with indignation at their injustice. Why, sir, could there have been a war had not the people been educated up to those beliefs ; and once educated, is it in the nature of things for one generation to discover its errors ? I wonder a metaphysician like yourself had not realized this. What matters it if Bryant and other fourth-rate partisan historians prattle on about their views of the questions ? Will not their works in a century from now be as unknown as are the fates of their authors in that undiscovered bourne ? and will not Bancroft and other noble historians give to succeeding ages a true version of that unhappy affair ? Remember, I am far from holding the South blameless, either in the actions which led up to secession or in its present treatment of the negro, and even think a little injustice will be healthy for them. I see you smile ; but if you will glance into that oft-quoted past of yours, you will discover man is invariably unjust until he feels the lash upon his own

shoulders ; so perhaps your philosophers, in tracing up the source from which the present injustice meted out to them is flowing, will discover the spot from whence springs their injustice towards the negro.

“I can give you a more definite idea concerning my thoughts of your bundle of wonders, as you called it, by naming it brutal,” she continued, with a smile ; “but in consideration of your glowing eulogy upon our common country, and of the belief that your heart is in the right place, much as your words belie it, I will pass no more strictures upon a course of reasoning which would shame Jezebel and Nero were they Siamese twins.”

“How pleasant and forcible are the words of unadulterated conviction !” Stanley said, with a slight grimace, as he turned to hear Lawrence’s criticism.

“I read somewhere the other day,” Lawrence said, throwing away his cigar, “that the line dividing wisdom from folly is so indefinite, that we frequently discover the fool and the philosopher working each other’s claims ; and when you began, it was difficult for me to decide whether you were a philosopher working the fool’s claim or *vice versa*. I even concluded, during one stage of your declamation, that you were the fool working a home claim ;

but as you proceeded the sentence was mitigated. My dear sir, you are Mark Anthony over again ; as he threw away the world for Cleopatra's eyes, so will you ignore common sense and reason, which you undoubtedly possess, to coquette with an absurdity. Your lordly contempt for the world and its follies is extremely amusing ; but as you are young yet, and I think Miss Ellswaith's answer was enough hot shot for one night, I will leave you in peace to grow wiser, to learn this jolly world is several years old, and has ambled on very amiably so far without your guidance. You may not believe it, sir, but I assure you, in all soberness, that if you were gathered to the skies this night, the earth would not miss the path in which it promenades around the sun because of the tears in its eyes, nor lose its grip on the axis while reaching for its pocket-handkerchief."

"Sir, my brain reels beneath the weight of your wisdom, and my heart sings at your joyful assurance," Stanley responded. "For you, sir, I have nothing but thanks ; but I wish to remind Miss Ellswaith of her charge of brutality against me, and ask her to supply a name for the reasoning which requires us to hold our hands and sigh, 'It will be all one a hundred years hence.' She made it very promi-

ment that acknowledging her people are heaping injustice upon mine, it amounted to nothing in the long run. It is true, oh, subtle sophist, that those poor, narrow-minded partisans will slumber ere long beneath the daisies, shrouded in the robes of oblivion; but, alas! will not many of their victims share the same fate? But, as you understand my meaning, let that pass. The points which I have endeavored to make prominent and which you both have failed to perceive, are these:

“First. Arguments are such dangerous tools, ‘prentice boys should beware of them.

“Second. When a self-assured mechanic chooses an instrument with which to bore his employer, the reader, he should at least select the auger of practical sense. By the way, I am stricken with the fear that the right reverend gentleman to whom I alluded forgot to do so.

“Third. The sentimentalist’s lachrymatory, the negro, is drowned in the dithyrambic cataclysm of purling tears with which the Rachels of Rama persist in deluging it, and if we *must* spend our tears, let us seek an urn not so assiduously patronized.

“Fourth. As I hear the rumble of progress and common sense in the distance, my heart sinks with

the fear of beholding those gentle-hearted creatures (the Rachels) trundled over with such a weight that sackcloth, ashes, sentiment, and anatomy will be undistinguishably blended.

“Now, if the liquid Niobes of the North would dry their tears long enough to allow reason a show, while reading the first chapter of *Dred*, by Mrs. H. B. Stowe, they would finish that chapter, and dissolve again into tears; but it would be in pity for their own and the writer’s inexplicable folly. The book begins with a Southern heiress sitting in her parlor confessing all her love adventures to a quadroon overseer (!). And, later on, the aforesaid overseer lips her fingers, while her lover, a South Carolina gentleman, looks on with the utmost complaisance. Yet that book has thrown a coruscating halo of reverence about the minds of multiplied thousands. O men, where are thy brains? O learning, where is thy victory?

“Miss Ellswaith and Mr. Hamilton, I have conversed a vast deal with Californians about the negro; in fact, I gave three months of my valuable time towards sounding the hearts of your people. And I must confess, of all the hundreds with whom I have conversed, you two alone are remiss in your duties. You have accused the South of

nothing but injustice towards this romancer's *Eureka*; and, candidly, I stand aghast at your heresy! But let me say this in defence of even your lone accusation: John Chinaman is in your midst, quiet, sober, industrious, and equally as pretty as the African; yet two-thirds of your people love their Bible better than they do Johnny. Why is it you invariably give Johnny your blessing when speaking to him, and frequently accompany it with a brickbat? So, when you explain the causes that prompt these actions and feelings, you will understand the only injustice which the Southerners mete out to the blacks. The survival of the fittest is an unwritten law, more irrevocable than that of the Medes and Persians, as is the world-wide instinct that makes a *Dives* more interesting to us than a *Lazarus*, or a philosopher more respected than a fool. Then, recognizing this, take to your metaphysics; rail on all humanity; but reserve your censure of the weakened South while she is grappling with the grim problem that lies at her door.

“I hope,” he continued, as they rose to separate, “that you will not imagine I have treated the subject flippantly. I feel more serious, perhaps, than my words would indicate. The rural districts of the South are rapidly changing in outward circum-

stances by the negroes withdrawing to large plantations and along the bottoms, while the whites congregate in neighborhoods to themselves. This, however, only complicates matters, and whether or not, when these colonies become denser and more strongly marked, there will be any Sabine enterprises among us I will leave for time to decide.

“George Cable understands this problem better than any one North or South, and could, perhaps, come nearer giving both parties justice than any man in either place; but even he fails to grasp its full import; and as the North lauds, and the South abuses, and the negro applauds, and his own conscience approves or condemns, he will become less and less fitted for umpire. It is a difficult undertaking for human nature to preserve its equilibrium under such a pressure of circumstances. When his beautiful and vividly-poetic imagination becomes inflamed by praise or embittered by abuse, and, perchance, injustice, he will commit himself more decidedly to one party or the other: then woe to us Sadducees, Pharisees,—that is, Southerners and negroes.

“Good-night, and pleasant dreams.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following day, despite hard work and innumerable cigars, seemed interminably long to Stanley. He thought of his coming interview with the Spaniard, of Raines and his fellow-workmen, and of his distant home; but, through it all, the conversation of the previous night haunted him still. The graceful figure of a lovely woman, whose dark, lustrous eyes smiling at his whimsical speeches, and sparkling when he struck some loftier strain, persistently hovered before him, recalling to his mind the beautiful words of that matchless poet,—

“She looked as if she sat by Eden’s door,
And grieved for those who could return no more.”

“Bah!” he said, stamping his foot with vexation, after searching for the smoothing plane which was lying directly under his nose, and attempting to saw a board with the steel square, “if this disease continues, farewell to this job and these superb hills. Cursed be the cause that brought me here to play the fool! Oh, exquisite irony of fate! was my life so peculiarly blessed, my shoulders so free from bur-

dens, that I needed this hopeless passion as alloy in the golden structure of my dreams? Verily, the little god is not only blind, but also, I fear, an arrant fool."

His soliloquy was disturbed at this juncture by a servant handing him a note. Opening it, he read,—

"MR. HUNTINGDON,—Please come to the sitting-room, I wish particularly to speak with you.

"IRENE ELLSWAITH."

Destroying the pencilled lines and drawing on his coat, he entered the house, and found Irene nervously fingering the keys of the organ. As he came forward she rose and said,—

"The family has gone to M—— to spend the afternoon with friends, and, as I wished to have a private talk with you, I pleaded headache and remained at home."

"I am at your service," he said, bowing and taking the seat she offered.

"I wish, Mr. Huntingdon, to speak of yourself," she said, in a hesitating tone, as the rich color fluttered up into her cheeks.

"Self is a pleasant subject to every one except a philosopher," he answered, pleasantly

"In that case," she replied, smiling, "I hope

you will forget that you are a philosopher, and tell me why a man of your brilliant talents is frittering away his time at carpentry.”

“The question is easily answered,” Stanley responded, carelessly. “Men of talent need bread and meat the same as simple mortals. I came West thinking I could secure a lucrative position before my bank account turned traitor, and the failure to do so left me the choice of my present occupation or starvation.”

“Would you object to resigning this work and returning to the city?” she asked, timidly.

“Certainly not, if you wish me to,” he said, with a bow; “but if I have gained Miss Ellswaith’s ill will I regret it exceedingly; and——”

“You misunderstand me,” she interrupted, hastily. “I have friends in the city who can help you to a position worthy your attainments.”

“I will relinquish this work the moment Colonel Ellswaith can secure a workman to fill my place,” he said, slowly; “but as to accepting aid at Miss Ellswaith’s hands, please excuse me.”

“Will you give me your reasons for refusing?” she asked, in a disappointed tone.

“There are more than one,” he replied, concealing his annoyance. “It is difficult to digest any patron;

but when that patron is a young lady—well—Believe me, Miss Ellswaith, I appreciate your kindness, but what you wish is impossible."

"I have spoken with my uncle about this," she said, flushing with impatience and confusion. "He proposes to assist you when this work is completed; but I cannot bear to see you occupying a menial position five or six weeks longer."

As Stanley listened to her nervous words and watched her convulsively-working fingers, like a blaze of light her secret reasons for this Quixotic proceeding were revealed to him; but crushing down the wild thoughts that darted through his brain, he picked up his hat and said, quietly,—

"I fear Miss Ellswaith's sympathy overestimates my ability. I have never studied business of any kind, and would compromise my patron; so, leave me in peace to occupy the only position I am capable of filling. As you so truthfully taught last night," he continued, with a bitter smile, "'it will be all the same a hundred years hence.' What does it matter whether death finds me at a workman's bench or in a banker's chair? Come it will, and oblivion will clothe the one fully as comfortably as the other."

"I would retort that is sorry philosophy in this

instance," she said, looking earnestly at him, "did I not suspect the feelings that prompt it. While looking at your scowling features now," she continued, in a soft voice, "a radiant face, bowed at that window, rises before me."

He started as if she had slapped him in the face, and, coloring with anger, said, sharply,—

"I hoped Miss Ellswaith had forgotten that scene; or, at least, would respect what was not intended for her eyes."

"Please pardon the allusion," she said, in a pained voice, "as, believe me, it was only an overmastering interest in you, and what concerns you, that prompted it. Is it strange that all my sympathies are stirred while watching a highly-gifted man struggling under cruel misfortune, and against some memory which seems to have embittered his whole life?"

Stanley could bear no more, and, starting to his feet, said, in a voice thrilling with emotion, "Miss Ellswaith, you have laid obligations upon a man who never forgets; and my one gentle thought in the future will be of the unparalleled kindness you have shown to me, a lowly workman. Seek no further to unveil my past; it has been one of unmitigated folly, the revealment of which would pain

us both ; so let the thickly-crowding years trample it into oblivion. While standing by that window, with your matchless tones thrilling through my bosom, feelings which I thought were lost to me forever cheered my desponding soul with their radiance ; but that radiance has since been obliterated by the soot from the dark devil which holds high carnival in my bosom, and the only consolation granted me is the knowledge that I am, at least, none the worse from the experience. My life has been a mistake, and it is too late now to remedy it ; but as I journey on to my grave, looking back over a wilderness of sin and folly, there will be a few passages in my life around which my mind will love to dwell. One such is my acquaintance with you.” Checking the torrent of his speech, he said, “ Allow me to thank you again for your courtesy and kindness. I will return to the city in three days.”

“ You will do nothing of the kind,” Irene said, rising and coming close up to him. “ If you cannot accept my offer, you can, at least, remain here until my uncle makes a similar one ; so promise me you will forget my request and continue as you began.”

As Stanley gazed down into the dark, lustrous

eyes raised anxiously to his, he seemed to become intoxicated with the magnetism of her presence ; his brain reeled, and his veins fairly ached as the hot blood rolled and quivered through his frame ; but, while looking into that lovely face, which was the world and all to him, he felt his self-control deserting him, and turning aside with lowering brow, exclaimed, harshly, "I cannot ! I must return. It is best that I should."

Irene shrank away, frightened at his fierce tones and dark scowl ; but as she watched him walk blindly out of the door, a soft, glad smile trembled around her lips.

"Be still, oh, beating heart !" she murmured, clasping her hands in ecstasy, "he loves me ! what matters the rest ? And ah ! my wayward king, proud as thou art, thou shalt yet win me and wear me. Sweet Heaven, how thou dost shower blessings upon my unworthy head !" And seating herself at the organ, with humid eyes, her full soul found vent in a grand burst of thanksgiving to Him who had thus blessed her life.

Ah ! what a painful contrast was this to the man who, with white, set face was leaning against his work-bench, handling himself with ungloved hands ! The very pain made him the more brutal to his

feelings, and it was pitiful to witness his writhing lips and quivering hands as he jeered at the rebellious pain in his bosom and heaped maledictions upon his folly.

Men are applauded and admired for coolly facing death in battle ranks, where there is much to sustain them ; but such heroism pales before the act of one who, standing as Stanley stood, looks back upon a past wrecked by his own blind folly, and then firmly faces a future more desolate still. It is well for man that he is forbidden to enter eternity until God beckons him hither, or how many would hasten after the loved ones gone before ; how many, becoming surfeited with the pain and monotonous of this existence, would grow over-curious concerning the mysteries of that other ; how many a despairing wretch at this hour would avail himself of that easy escape from the consequences of his own misdeeds. Many do so as it is, but raise the ban, and in twelve months stand aghast at the roll-call of “one more unfortunate.”

The very intensity of Stanley’s passion soon exhausted itself, and as it subsided, allowing calmer thought to assume control, a softer look stole over his features.

“Thank God !” he thought, “this comes from no

unworthy act of hers. Did it do so, I hardly think I could face Heaven with good faith, which is the only hope left me now. Poor Blondine, if you felt as I feel, may God pity you. If the memory of two such angels cannot guide me home, earth holds nothing that can. Ah, God ! lift me up, make me worthy to meet them in Thy kingdom, and I will ask no more."

CHAPTER XVII.

STANLEY informed Colonel Ellswaith, at the dinner-table, of his intention to return to the city, and, after finishing the meal, lighted a cigar, and striking into the trail leading southward, soon found himself at the Spaniard's door. He was surprised at the immense size of the smoothly-stuccoed building ; for, though it was only a story and a half in height, it rambled around with large, airy rooms, long, wide halls and open courts, over more than two acres of ground. The touch of modern hands had softened and beautified the originally gloomy pile. The stucco, covering the sun-dried brick walls, was hardened and polished till it shone like glass ; the

original tile roofing had given place to slate, while open balconies, and wide, breezy verandas graced the whole. On entering, he was dazzled by the rich furniture and costly ornaments scattered in lavish profusion on every hand ; and following the servant through rooms carpeted with magnificent Brussels, and whose walls were hung with heavy, gold-fringed tapestry, and decorated by the pencil and chisel of masters, he was ushered into what seemed half library, half sitting-room.

Upon a velvet-cushioned lounge, and arrayed in rich vestments that displayed his superb figure to the best advantage, reclined the Spaniard. Shading his eyes from the brilliant light raying from the heavy, gold-chased candelabra, he turned as the door swung open, and seeing Stanley, rose and welcomed him to his house.

“ You are punctual, I see,” he said, in his harsh, strong voice, “ which is one of the few things I admire.”

“ I always endeavor to be prompt,” Stanley responded, seating himself in the arm-chair which his host offered him.

As the Spaniard threw himself carelessly upon the lounge facing Stanley, a door upon his left swung in, admitting a middle-aged female servant.

She bore a large waiter in her hands, which was covered with glasses, bottles, fruit, and cigar-boxes, and as she placed it upon a small stand her master said, briefly,—

“Bid your mistress hither.”

As they were pledging each other in a deep draught of the rich native wine, the door opened again, admitting a young girl with sloe-black eyes, whose heavy locks of straight black hair rioted in prodigal profusion down her rounded and petite form. She blushed on seeing a stranger, and stood hesitating until the Spaniard, beckoning to her, turned to Stanley and said,—

“Mr. Huntingdon, this is Ryene Alvarado, ‘sole daughter of my house and heart.’”

Stanley returned the greeting of the confused maiden, and as they began conversing on commonplace topics, he noted the tenderness with which the Spaniard regarded his child. “So,” he mused, as he watched the father softly stroking her luxuriant hair, “this fierce old grandee has a soft spot in his heart, after all.”

After exhausting her store of pretty nothings the little maiden kissed her father, patting him on the cheek as she did so, and, courtesying to Stanley, glided from the room.

When the door closed after her retreating form, the Spaniard, draining a glass of wine, turned to Stanley and said,—

“I suppose, young man, you are curious to learn how I became acquainted with your father. It is easily told. I was desperately wounded at Churubusco during your countrymen’s piratical expedition into Mexico, and your father rescued me, nursed me, and laid a thousand gentle courtesies upon me, which last is more than I can say for the remainder of your—blessed insolent race. But let that pass. We were thrown constantly together during my tedious convalescence; and when we separated he presented to me his likeness, which I have yet, and when you answered me as you did the other night, I detected the resemblance in a moment. The fact is, you are such a faithful copy of him nothing but stupidity prevented my recognizing you at once. So, if you will pardon your rude reception at my hands and claim my hospitality, I will endeavor to discharge to you the debt of gratitude I owe your father.”

Answering him in the same spirit, Stanley turned the conversation upon other themes, and was surprised at the vast erudition his host displayed. But while he conversed with equal facility upon any and all subjects, such a settled hate and bitterness

against all mankind boiled up in his deep tones that Stanley, inured to cynicism as he was, shrank from the lurid lightnings of his scathing satire. And as he listened and looked while the Spaniard rambled on, seemingly determined to exhaust all of his jeers and maledictions in one grand burst, the belief grew steadily upon him that he had somewhere seen those rugged features and heard that strong, sonorous voice. Being, however, unable to recall any incident to substantiate the belief, he waited patiently until the Spaniard, delivering all mankind, body and soul, to sheol's lowest realm, turned to him and said,—

“ You must pardon this outrageous proceeding ; the sight of your face has roused all the blistered ghosts of my past and, as you are the only American to whom I have spoken for years, I cannot forego the luxury of redamning a race which has crowded a hotter hell into my bosom than that prince of fanatics, Tertullian, ever dreamed of. May the accumulated and concentrated curse of Moloch’s rebellious legions light red-hot upon their insolent and hell-heated heads ! There, that is the benediction which dismisses the congregation ; so, now tell me something of yourself. Why do I find the son of Lewis Huntingdon apparelled like a

gentleman, and occupying, as he informs me, a menial's position?"

"It is through a series of misfortunes which would hardly interest you," Stanley answered, evasively.

"Come, come, young sir," the Spaniard said, proffering Stanley the cigars, "I know you think you had as well choose Beelzebub at once for a confidant, but I assure you I am anxious to hear your story; and, as none but menials surround me, it is unlikely that I will abuse your confidence,—so out with it."

Stanley never knew what prompted him to respond to this brusque invitation; but the wine was warming a heart sore with its own bitterness and longing for sympathy; so, ere he was well aware of the fact, he was narrating the vicissitudes of his short but varied life. He spoke of his Mississippi home, his irregular and unfortunate training, and then in simple, touching words portrayed his love for Lena and its consequences, the reckless after-life, and manner of dissipating his fortune, then touching lightly on his experience as a carpenter, paused.

"Complete the story," the Spaniard said, after waiting a few minutes for Stanley to resume.

"It is complete," Stanley answered, wondering at the gentle but melancholy look that softened the rugged features of the other.

"I will continue the narration," the Spaniard said. "An unlucky fate brought you in the capacity of carpenter to Colonel Ellswaith's home, where you meet his niece, who, I understand, is a second Juliet, and, being unable to play the Romeo, you are hesitating between the desire to prove yourself a man by nursing yourself into a beatific resignation to the slings of fate and the wild longings to find rest, recreation, and better company in the confines of sheol. Am I not correct?"

"The present is mine and mine alone," Stanley said, haughtily; "so leave me in peace to shape it as I think best."

"Well, well, just as you like," the Spaniard responded. "I must confess, however, that you have had a varied and unlovely experience, and I admire the pluck which has enabled you to bear it."

The Spaniard indulged in no further idiosyncrasies, and proved such an agreeable companion that the clock struck twelve before Stanley realized how time was flying. On starting up to take his leave, his host, after urging him in vain to spend the

night, drew on a sombrero and accompanied him to the foot of the mountain.

As they walked along in silence, the Spaniard turned suddenly and said, "You acted a fool, young sir."

"In what particular instance?"

"With that little Lena of yours. Mark my words, the future will reveal her truth and innocence."

"I would like to entertain that hope," Stanley answered, simply, "but I read her own condemnation."

"That may be true, but you will discover that letter to be a fraud; the work of some abandoned wretch who hated you both. We part here," he continued, pausing and turning to Stanley; "when will I see you again?"

"Never, perhaps," Stanley answered; "I return to San Francisco the day following to-morrow."

"The work was hardly worth your trip out."

"There is an abundance of work; but I have concluded to return and send a friend of mine out to complete it."

"So, so," the Spaniard said, looking at him keenly, "I read your history correctly after all. Good-night."

Stanley walked slowly on until reaching the spot where a small stream, leaping from the cliffs above and opening out like a bridal veil, lost itself in billowy foam among the rocks beneath ; there he paused, and was watching the fires gleaming along the distant heights, and listening to the sweep of the falling waters, when a hoarse voice said,—

“ It seems I am not the only uneasy spirit abroad to-night.”

Wheeling round, Stanley saw Lawrence Hamilton standing, with white, set face, in the moonlight.

“ What were the thoughts I disturbed ? ” he said, with a short laugh at Stanley’s surprise.

“ I was only thinking,” Stanley answered, “ what a glorious exchange it would be if, by laying my worthless carcass in its grave, I could gain for my restless spirit an eternal home amid these beautiful scenes.

“ But what has happened, Mr. Hamilton ? ” he asked, after a moment’s silence.

“ Happened ? I—oh, nothing very serious,” Lawrence replied. “ I have only lost the love of the sweetest woman on earth, and with it the happiness of a lifetime,—that is all.”

Stanley extended his hand in silent sympathy, and as Lawrence grasped it, he continued :

“I said I lost her love ; possibly I never possessed it, but I think otherwise, and I believe I am clasping the hand of him who has stolen it from me. Nay, do not start away ; so far am I from blaming you, I would pour out all my wealth at your feet did I think you could make her happy.”

As Stanley watched the grand suffering face at his side he was overwhelmed with a bitter sense of his own littleness ; and, wringing his companion’s hand, he exclaimed,—

“It is preposterous to suppose she would turn from such as you to fix her love upon my unworthiness.”

“Your modesty does you credit,” Lawrence replied ; “you are fiery and impetuous like the clime that nursed you, you are also as full of imperfections as this world is of suffering, but there is much in you that is lovable, and I suppose she has discovered it ; so stop brooding over your shortcomings and endeavor to lengthen them, for where I would give you my fortune and my life to secure her happiness I would slay you did you bring her to grief.”

“You are overwrought at present,” Stanley said, gently ; “let us return and speak no further of what is utterly futile.”

“I know you think my speech proceeds from

the rashness of despair," Lawrence said, looking earnestly at Stanley; "let me assure you of the contrary. It has been three hours since I learned my fate, and I have lived years in the mean time. I will marry some day, certainly, in order to perpetuate my name, but to love Irene Ellswaith once is to love her forever; because, love cannot decline, it requires an object more worthy than the last, and to rise above her is to reach the angels. You understand me and realize why I am doomed. I have lost her. You are her equal mentally, I will see that you are financially; so go to her, and if she loves you make her happy, that is all I ask."

"The nobility of your sacrifice is as grand as your generosity is boundless," Stanley replied, repressing a smile; "but it fails to prevent your offer from being ridiculous. There is as little likelihood of my accepting your offer as there is of the fallen angels regaining their lost territory; so make yourself easy until your overwrought brain will allow you to realize what you are asking. It is late,—let us return."

"I promised Irene I would conceal this denouement from her aunt, at least for the present; so leave me to regain my self-possession by morning," Lawrence said, turning away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As the family gathered at the breakfast-table the following morning, Stanley noticed Lawrence's gloomy, abstracted air, and to prevent others from observing the same, he drew all eyes upon himself by relating his adventures with the Spaniard. When he concluded with a eulogy upon the Spaniard's vast learning and seemingly unlimited wealth, the little blonde turned to Colonel Ellswaith with a look of injured innocence upon her saucy face as she sighed,—

“Sir, did we deserve this at your hands?”

“Deserve what, chatterbox?” the colonel asked, with a smile.

“You propose to entertain us, indeed have searched this country in your endeavors to amuse us, and all the time this ogre's den lay at your door. Had I known this three months earlier he would be at my feet this moment, singing my praise instead of sulking in his lair, abusing all mankind. Oh, what—”

“Ha!” the colonel exclaimed, glancing over a

note which a servant handed him. “Mr. Huntingdon, you are a wizard. Here that Spaniard has sulked among us for ten years, not deigning to notice even our very existence. You appear on the scene and, presto! here comes a perfumed invitation to attend an entertainment at his house. Ladies, shall we accept the——”

A chorus of ayes interrupted the question, as the ladies laughingly planned their *modus operandi* of subjugating this interesting old grandee.

“Mr. Huntingdon,” the colonel continued, the moment he could make himself heard, “you are particularly requested to attend; in fact, he leaves you no possible excuse for refusing. He tells me to insist on your accompanying us, as he wishes to speak with you on several subjects left unbroached during your last night’s interview. Indeed, I for one would hesitate about invading this ogre-land without your magic wand to protect me.”

“You will find his roar more frightful than his spring,” Stanley replied. “He is peculiar, however, and you must be on your guard while conversing with him; for by patiently listening while he anathematized my countrymen is, I think, what gained me favor in his eyes.”

The family laughingly separated after this to

make preparations for the coming event ; and when the hour for departure arrived Stanley discovered he was billeted for a seat with Lawrence, Irene, and the little blonde. Although only a short distance across the hills to the Spaniard's home, it was full six miles by way of the valley, and to this trio it promised to be an awkward drive. The little blonde, however, was serenely unconscious of any friction, and chattered on until she fortunately introduced a non-committal subject by exclaiming,—

“ Oh, Mr. Hamilton, I read the loveliest letter to-day about women's rights, and you just ought to see how nicely she abused you menfolks.”

“ There will be an earthquake shortly, I fear,” Lawrence said, gravely, as he glanced across the valley to where Mount Diablo loomed up against the fading eastern sky.

“ What do you mean, sir ? Are you trying to be satirical ? I read all the papers, sir, whether you believe it or not. Why, I am even writing an article exposing our woes.”

“ Mercy !” Lawrence cried. “ I implore you, in the name of humanity, to desist, or at least allow us time to escape to foreign shores. Do you think because Dame Nature has sat quietly during preceding wonders she can maintain her equanimity

over the last? Why, my dear child, if you complete that article, she will start from her seat, shake her hoary locks, and send us where women cease from troubling and men, of course, are at rest."

"Nonsense! Because I don't look solemn like an owl, or a man, and don't use big words, you imagine I never think; but when my article appears you will discover your error. Yes, and you will also blush over your own selfishness and silly reasonings when I expose them; when I prove a woman can be as amiable and lovable dropping a ballot in the box as slipping a billet-doux in the post-bag; when I show that, while you let us attend church every Sabbath with perfect equanimity, and have us pace all over the country on begging expeditions for that church, you are shaken with a fear of unkept and abandoned homes if we think of devoting one day in two years to the polls; and—and—well, you just wait and see."

This sally seemed to touch Lawrence, for he responded, gravely, "You will doubtless prove God was jesting when, speaking through his chosen teachers, he subordinated woman to man; and then you will discover the seal of authority on *your* brows; thus proving that our imagining we are the lords of creation is a snare and a delusion. You

will then by a flourish of rhetorical trumpets prove that women's home-bred purity and innocence can preserve its immaculate robes unsullied through the alleys of money-grabbing and the purlieus of political intrigues; in short, you will prove her more than human: exempt from temptation, incapable of being corrupted by circumstances, impossible to err, invulnerable against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil, through time and all eternity."

"Where is your South's boasted chivalry, Mr. Huntingdon?" the little blonde cried, when Lawrence concluded. "I didn't think it would see a woman imposed on in this way without defending her."

"Pray pardon me," Stanley replied, laughing, "I imagined you were having the best of it. I am, however," he continued, addressing Lawrence, "really surprised that a man of your ability would gravely advance such time-worn platitudes as arguments to sustain a stupendous and world-wide fraud."

"You believe in 'woman's rights'!" Lawrence and Irene exclaimed, in a breath.

"Certainly," Stanley responded. "And how any one, after giving it fifteen minutes of deliberate thought, can believe otherwise is beyond my com-

prehension. The Bible may *appear* to vindicate your interpretation of its pages, but I fail to discover it; and even if I were convinced such were its teachings, I would unhesitatingly affirm that the trial of twenty-five hundred years has unassailably proven it inculcates pernicious doctrine. For, although wiseacres strenuously endeavor to render unto religion the credit of our present civilization, history convincingly proves their falsehood, and grandly and graphically portrays woman fighting her way, step by step, through succeeding ages, until, rising from the degrading position assigned her by barbaric lords, she gently leads religion itself to a proper conception of its duties towards man and his Maker.* Disrobing it of its bloody and disgustingly-superstitious garments, she has healed its repulsive sores, clothed it with the mantle of her own spotless

* I suppose Stanley meant the teachers of religion, influenced by woman's gentler mind, interpreted the Scriptures less harshly than formerly. He seemed to imagine it requires woman's presence to prevent man from getting "blood in his eye" while looking towards the glories of the Beyond, the same as it requires smoked glass to prevent blindness while gazing at the sun. Remembering that he was sitting by the gracious lady of his love, we must make all allowances for his somewhat daring assertions.

innocence, and given it, in all of its virgin purity, to a thankless world. And it takes no prophet to realize that were she degraded now from her present station, our ministers and leaders, in a cycle of years, by hunting down and burning witches and heretics, and otherwise enacting the sublime comedy of ancient centuries, would nobly vindicate her wrongs. Then, after watching her with gentle hands smooth every path which she has been allowed to enter, humanize every circle in which she moved, girdling and restraining, as it were, a heedlessly cruel world with her softer and juster instincts,—then, I say, after watching this, if man hesitates to enlarge her sphere of action by every possible means in his power, why, it is time God was gathering him home and giving to her a worthy mate.”

Under cover of the darkness of the night and the carriage Stanley felt a warm little hand steal into his, as Irene’s voice said, gently,—

“ Speak no further, Mr. Huntingdon, or I will deserve the opprobrium of turncoat.”

A blaze of chain-lightning seemed to dance along Stanley’s veins as he pressed the soft palm, and continued :

“ It might be unwise, politically, to emancipate, at once, a body of women that, by our own selfish-

ness, has been hitherto debarred from threading those intricate paths ; we manifested no hesitancy, however, in overturning the sentimentalist's lachrymatory, the negro, upon a defenceless ballot-box, and why we should demur in a more excusable instance is more than I can conceive. Acknowledging, furthermore, that it is unwise to liberate them at once, how long would it require us to widen the mission of our educational institutions and train them mentally as Lycurgus did physically ? But as I remember the lofty mental and moral standard of the lovely and matchless women of my own sunny land, and know their counterparts are scattered abroad throughout this wide-spread republic, I for one would not only give to them every liberty known to a Christian nation, but could confidently trust my very soul to their God-fearing guidance."

"It is well for your mountain of poetical froth, young man, that we have arrived at our destination," Lawrence said, as the carriage drew up at the Spaniard's door ; "or you would behold it, cloud-kissing as it is, whirled into space by a gale of common sense." And tucking the little blonde's hand beneath his arm, he entered the house ; thus awarding to Stanley the glorious opportunity of following suit with Irene.

“‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,’ ” Stanley thought, as he felt her little hand upon his arm; and like the shipwrecked sailor who drowns his senses in ardent spirits before leaping into the howling waves, he abandoned himself more completely to the intoxication of the hour, regardless of the unillumined years that stretched beyond. They trod the brilliantly-lighted halls, the voluptuously-furnished chambers, and listened to the soft splashing of the innumerable fountains; but he saw no light save that raying from those lustrous eyes, no beauty save in that smiling face, and heard no music save those gently-modulated tones.

What a delicate blending there is of bliss and torture in an all-mastering but seemingly hopeless passion! each being augmented by the tantalizing antithesis. One moment the bosom is thrilling from the soft glance of the starry-eyed god, the next it is shuddering from the Medusa-like stare of an inexorable fate; one moment love’s warm tide, bearing flowering petals upon its rosy crest, swells in the bosom, the next moment feels the ebb of an Arctic flood: thus rages the relentless war, till outraged nature would gladly hail the dark boatman and beard Rhadamanthus on his judg-

ment-seat for the privilege of draining the fabled cup which hangs beyond.

They entered a wide, lofty apartment, whose gold-spangled tapestry, polished mirrors, and richly-chased ornaments rescentillated the countless lights with such dazzling brilliancy that it all but blinded them.

There were twelve ladies and as many gentlemen assembled in the room when Stanley and Irene entered, and it seemed the host and his daughter were only awaiting their arrival; for as they came forward, the two hastened to welcome them and then led the way to a spacious open court where fifteen or twenty Mexican youth were dancing a rude bolero.

You are wishing, dear reader, for a minute description of this dance and the dancers. But I beg you to desist, and to allow your imagination to cast a soft halo of beauty about a scene which my too truthful pen may lucklessly mar. As you well know, to ravish a gypsy of his dirt and rags is to rob him of all that is picturesque; so, if you will give to the *lower* caste Mexican maid a wide straw hat, an ill-fitting calico gown, red stockings, and saucy slippers, she will make a pleasing picture with her elfish locks, sloe-black eyes, and

wild natural beauty; but array her in polite raiment and what an unpolite denouement we have! She becomes self-conscious, and the untrained savage stares at you from every button on her person. Those gathered in the court were dressed, some in white, some in dazzling calico prints, with broad belts around their waists; and as they danced with untamed grace to the rude music of their native instruments, it made a picture extremely fascinating to the beholder. At least it proved so to the guests of that night; for after the romantic scene and surroundings had dispelled their usually frigid decorum, a string band hidden by the foliage began sweeping the court with its lively notes, and ere any one was aware of it almost all of the younger members were on their feet indiscriminately choosing partners for a cotillon. A jaunty vaquero robbed Stanley of Irene, rendering him so desperate that he seized on an elfish-looking Mexican maid, who had been slyly ogling the handsome *Americanos*, and perceiving that *loud* dancing was the order of the hour, he began executing the extravagant but not ungraceful steps of the Southern blacks.

“I claim you for the next set, Mr. Huntingdon,” the little blonde laughingly cried, as Stanley, cutting

an outrageous “buck head,” wheeled past her in the mazy dance.

It seemed to Stanley that his blood was on fire with the delirious excitement of the night, and the lively exercise was so in unison with his pulse that he felt as if he could dance forever. “‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,’ ” he repeated, and casting care to the winds, danced with an ease and agility that would have turned an Irish professional green with envy.

He watched Irene’s rounded form as, with sparkling eyes and graceful abandon, she circled through the figures; and as he passed Lawrence, who had led out the Spaniard’s daughter, he noticed the flush on his cheeks and the *éclat* with which he swung the trim little figure of his partner.

“The day of miracles is not yet past,” the little blonde said, as they met again in the rounds, “for ‘Upper-Tendom’ has gone stark mad.”

The dancing continued at intervals for a couple of hours; though, after the first set, the proprieties were better heeded. At a sign from their master the Mexicans had retired, leaving the guests to enjoy their favorite dances, and, as the dreamy notes of a waltz began filling the air with its voluptuous strains, Stanley and Irene led off a dozen graceful

couples which floated around the softly-illumined court, like the airy pageant of some exquisite dream.

As Stanley looked at the rosy face and smiling lips so temptingly near, his pulses thrilled with the magnetism of her presence; and he wished that some kind *genius loci* would touch them with his magic wand, and condemn them to continue dancing thus forever. But our sweetest moments are the briefest; and all too soon the music ceased, and another partner led her away, leaving him feeling as I imagine the Peri felt when the pitying angel, claiming yet a purer gift, closed the jasper gates of Paradise upon his longing eyes.

When the dancing flagged, the host, leading them through a flowery arch, discovered to their admiring eyes a scene worthy of fairy-land. Upon a small, smoothly-shaven greensward, over which torch and moonlight struggled for mastery, stood a richly-draped table covered with heavy china and silver-ware, and loaded with luxuries of every clime; while above the velvety seats encircling the table heavily-laden fruit-trees of every conceivable variety drooped their graceful boughs.

As the guests became seated, and picturesquely-apparelled servants, issuing from the leafy avenues, stood waiting his bidding, the Spaniard said,—

“Ladies and gentlemen, the knowledge that tonight has broken the seclusion of ten or more years, will, I hope, constrain you to overlook all absence of etiquette during this repast. I am behind your day, and, of course, outside the pales of civilization; however, I extend to you as compensation a double welcome; so take what is before, pluck what is above you, order what is wanted, and feel yourselves at home.”

The guests caught the unrestrained spirit of the hour, and a stream of laughter and repartee circled round the board as they did ample justice to the elegant *cuisine*. The wine Stanley drank (don’t start, reader, every one (the I. O. G. T.’s excepted), babies and all, in that land of vineyards, drinks the native juice in which lurks no guile), quickening his already crazy pulse, caused him to laugh, jest, and impale all who dared challenge him upon such keen shafts of wit that even the high-bred repose of Lady Ellswaith was disturbed by audible mirth.

Lingering over the meal for an hour, they then broke up, wandering off in pairs to inspect the elegantly-kept grounds, exploring its artificially-intricate avenues, its delicious summer-houses, its lighted and begemmed grottos, and its living amphitheatres.

Stanley and Irene wandered off together, and, though the bosom of each was shadowed by thoughts of the coming separation, each concealed it alike, by chatting lightly on other themes, and robbing the vocabulary of adjectives to bestow them upon the matchless scenes around them. Discovering a mammoth tent, formed by training a circle of vines to the lofty top of a giant eucalyptus, they entered and seating themselves lapsed into silence after a few minutes of desultory conversation.

Through an opening in the opposite side of this living tent they could see an avenue leading off into the dense shrubbery, and from some side-path leading into this they saw two figures issue and pause as if in earnest discussion. They recognized the little blonde and a young San José merchant who had been particularly attentive to her wants the past few weeks. He appeared to be assiduously urging some claim, and ultimately, it seemed, carried his point, for, after glancing both ways along the moonlit avenue, he drew her to his bosom and kissed her flower-like face.

The sight wellnigh maddened Stanley, and, springing to his feet with a fierce imprecation, he turned to Irene with quivering lips and said, "It is late; let us return."

She rose, and, silently placing her hand on his arm, turned into an opposite path.

“I never dreamed of your caring for her,” Irene said, shyly, after they had walked on a few moments in silence.

“I am really distressed at your blindness,” Stanley answered, mockingly. “I thought my infatuation for her was apparent to every one.”

Irene, of course, understood from the beginning what wrung the imprecation from Stanley’s lips, and entertained the hope that while disclaiming the soft impeachment he would by the tumult of his feelings be hurried into committing himself; but when, contrary to all precedent, he began speaking carelessly on other themes, leaving her to draw her own inferences from his rude answer, she stifled a sigh and walked on in silence. She recognized his stubborn spirit, and having advanced as far as her maidenly modesty would allow, waited until the influence of time and her own secret prayer should melt the icy wall his rebellious pride had reared between them.

Realizing how completely this peerless beauty, who reigned undisputed queen over men of wealth and high estate, had crucified her pride to encourage his advances, and how rudely he had repelled her;

realizing how unconditionally her proud spirit had surrendered to the all-conquering love which had transformed her from a regal woman to a sweet, simple, loving maiden; realizing how impossible it was for him to accept the wealth of love thus lavished upon him,—all this filled Stanley's bosom with such fierce rebellion, that, had it been possible, like the patriarch of old, to curse God and die, that moment would have sealed his fate. But as he watched the shadow on her sweet face better thoughts claimed his mind, touching him with remorse for the brutality he had displayed. "She suffers also," he thought with a bitter pang, "and bears it uncomplainingly, like the noble woman she is; while I, with the usual selfishness of my sex, become so enamoured of my own misery that I cannot see the pain I give during my unmanly bursts of passion."

"Miss Ellswaith," he said, as they neared the house, "this will be our last opportunity of speaking to each other alone, and I want to ask your pardon for my rudeness, and to thank you once more for your unvarying kindness. I have but few things to thank God for, but His giving to me your friendship overbalances all the suffering with which He has seen fit to enrich my life. I will be a bet-

ter man from having known you. At least I will make a sturdy fight before allowing Satan to urge me into any path which will make you blush for one whom you have honored with your friendship. I will leave to-morrow morning before you rise, and we may never meet again in this life, but—thinking on the past week will perhaps shorten my otherwise cheerless journey to what without that memory would have been a hopeless grave."

When he ceased speaking, Irene said, gently, "What has been your sufferings in the past I know not; but that they have been more bitter than usually fall to the lot of one mortal I feel certain, or your clear and vigorous intellect would not be blinded as it is to some things. You rarely speak of man or your Maker without being unjust, but as I believe it more often proceeds from passionate thoughtlessness than deliberate principles, I will not mention the inconsistencies I have detected in your conversations. You speak of God enriching your life with suffering. Ah! scrutinize your past well before bringing such a charge against that all-merciful Being. You have so much in you that is truly noble, that for me to bear your assurance that I have aided you to better thoughts is a priceless boon indeed; and if there is any virtue in the

prayers of one for another, rest assured that you will not miss your way to that better land."

While speaking they had walked into the lights streaming from the windows, and turning, they looked into each other's eyes.

"This is our farewell," she said, smiling softly. "May the knowledge of my faith in you haunt you forever!"

They found the company taking its leave, and as they entered the Spaniard came forward and said,—

"I will have to ask Miss Ellswaith to excuse Mr. Huntingdon, as I expect him to remain with me to-night.

"I will see that you reach the depot in the morning," he continued, as Stanley began protesting against this off-hand manner of disposing of himself. "And I feel certain Miss Ellswaith will pardon me for robbing her of her escort."

"Yield to him the pleasure that you rob me of," Irene answered, with a smile, "and I will relinquish my claim."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE company had departed, the household had retired, and the Spaniard was pacing restlessly up and down a long room, the walls of which were lined with paintings, while Stanley stood dejectedly by an open window.

There was an unwonted fire in the Spaniard's black, restless eyes as they turned, ever and anon, towards the drooping figure by the window; and, pausing at last by a small table, he filled a couple of large chalices with sparkling wine, as he said,—

“Come, Mr. Huntingdon, I see the excitement of to-night has been too much for you; so drink this wine. It will re-nerve you and enable you to bear a long story with which I mean to bore you.”

As Stanley silently drank off the wine, the Spaniard continued: “I know you are surprised at this night's burst of sociability; and after listening to my Christian eulogies upon mankind generally during our last interview, you well know it was neither for my own pleasure nor aggrandizement that I invited those people hither. Ha, ha! I could

have dispensed with the bliss derived from to-night's entertainment with saint-like fortitude. But enough of that. When you have heard my story, you will perceive the motives that prompted me to endure their presence.

“As you have doubtlessly suspected ere this, I am no Spaniard. I am a Virginian by birth, and the same hour which cursed me with life blessed me with a Eugene Aram for a brother. We grew up as unlike as were Jacob and Esau, and, like that prince of thieves, he defrauded me not only of my birthright in this world but also in the one to come ; if, perchance, there is another, which I seriously doubt, for why God would wish to be eternally shamed by the presence of the besotted offspring of his own handiwork is more than I can conceive. Be that as it may, my brother and I grew and thrived. I was fiery and impetuous ; he was grave and stern. I loved field sports and jovial company ; he haunted libraries and indulged in lonely walks and silent contemplation ; in short, I was a gay, unthinking youth, while he was an erudite scholar. How I loved, trusted, and revered his grandly-intellectual being God and my own wasted years are living witnesses.

“While pressing across the threshold which

divides youth from manhood I met Cora Patton, a fair young girl who lived in an adjoining valley; and I think it must have been mutual love at sight, for we flew into each other's arms with all the thoughtless ardor of inexperienced youth. From that hour life held for me a sweeter, deeper meaning, and realizing my manifold deficiencies caused by my too careless educational training, I turned to my brother, as I had ever done, for aid. With characteristic patience he taught me, advised me, and gently led me into a wider and loftier conception of what life should be. How I loved and honored that quiet, scholarly man! It is impossible for you to conceive what an ascendancy his noble intellect had gained over my impulsive spirit. Even standing as I do looking back over a miserably-wasted life, the result of his unparalleled and unapproachable deception, it is with something almost akin to awe that I brand him even now as a traitor.

“To portray my love for her, my veneration for him; to describe the blissful hours spent with her in roaming amid the matchless scenes of the Old Dominion; to portray the profitable hours spent with him in his library; to describe the shock I felt when, after meeting my brother, Cora crept

into my arms and whispered that there was something uncanny in his eyes, something that frightened her,—to picture all this is impossible, for my tongue has lost its cunning with softer themes since coining blistering maledictions during forty odd wretched years; so look upon her angel face and let your imagination supply the love that rounded out my life and crowned it with a glory too great for this jealous world."

Stanley stepped forward as the Spaniard unveiled the picture, and discovered the bright, winsome features of a maiden not more than eighteen years of age; and as he noted the pensive light in her large, soft eyes, and traced the tremulous sensitiveness in the curves of the rosy lips, he realized that he beheld the representation of one of those who, by their pure, unselfish loves, and, too often, fatally tragic endings, smites the cynics dumb.

The Spaniard's stern lips trembled with emotion as he gazed on the life-like picture; but turning away, he continued, harshly: "Back into your shrouds, ye roseate memories, and rise, ye caldrons in which seethe the hottest lava that ever seared an unsuspecting bosom. Just a month ere she and I were to consummate our happiness, I was sitting in my brother's library dreaming the dreams that had

so often visited me, when he entered looking unusually pale and grave. Walking across to the fire, he leaned against the mantel, gazing moodily into the glowing embers, and after a few minutes spent thus, he turned to me and said,—

“‘ Guy, I have news which you will scarcely believe ; and did I not know you are a noble, generous youth, capable of making any sacrifice for those you love, it would be difficult indeed for me to face you now.’

“ Ah, how my heart beat at that low-spoken praise ! And rising, I laid my hand upon his shoulder as I said, ‘ In your behalf no sacrifice would be too great, my brother.’

“‘ I wish no sacrifice for myself,’ he responded, gently, ‘ but I fear one more terrible awaits you in a dearer quarter.’ And as I stood mute from the dark forebodings that crowded upon me, he placed his hand upon my shoulder and continued :

“‘ I know, Guy, that in thirty days you expect to wed that sweet child in the adjoining valley, and that your very soul hangs upon its happy consummation ; but if you suspected she loved you no longer, and sickened at the mere thought of the approaching nuptials, what would be your course ?’

“‘I would act as becomes a man,’ was my reply; ‘but for the love of God indulge no longer in such dark insinuations. Speak out, speak out!’

“‘My poor Guy, my unhappy brother, brace yourself for the pain in store for you. I discovered this afternoon that Cora Patton loves you no longer, and to give a more bitter twang to the irony of fate has lavished her love upon my unworthy self.’

“You doubtless wonder what was my reply to this. I merely glanced about the room like a criminal casting his farewell look on earth and sky ere being swung into eternity, then, clasping his hand, I said,—

“‘Go to her and make her happy,—that is all I ask; but leave me now, I am best alone.’ Ha, ha, ha! when I think now of the sublime trust that unquestioningly received those words, without one ruffle of doubt concerning his innocence and honor in the whole transaction, my very soul turns a derisive somersault at my magnificent stock of verdancy. Oh, thou sweet simplicity of downy youth! what a comfortable sheol earth spreads for thy reception!”

“In the name of God who are you?” Stanley cried, rising excitedly.

“So you have heard the tale before?” the other

said, with a smile. "Yes, young man, I am your uncle Guy."

"Thank God!" Stanley exclaimed, fervently, as he seized his uncle's hand. "I have often longed to see you, and wondered whether you were dead or alive. But complete your history; it pained my father so much that I could never prevail on him to tell me all."

"Your father was a noble man," Stanley's uncle (whom we will call Spaniard no longer) said, drawing him to a seat by his side, "and it was his unselfish devotion in Mexico, and his unparalleled bravery on her hard-fought fields, that prevented me in after years from believing all truth and nobility had flown for refuge to the angels. Well, there is little more to be told. My Jacob of a twin brother, with the utmost magnanimity, offered to resign business and visit the Old World to allow me to regain my affiancée's affections, which offer I, of course, refused to accept. Forcing him to promise he would marry her, I enlisted for the Mexican war, accompanied by your father. It was on the stormy field of Churubusco that he proved his undying love for his unhappy brother. We were attempting to carry the works by storm, when a desperate sortie hurled our columns backward from the field;

and ere I was aware of my danger a hundred or more raging Mexican devils closed around me. I fought with the cool intrepidity of one careless of life, piling the enemy in gory heaps for my funeral pyre; but I was overcome at last, and as I was sinking beneath a hundred strokes, I heard your father cry, '*Courage, brother!*' and the next moment, standing astride my prostrate form, he was covering me with the dead bodies of my assailants. I heard an encouraging cheer, and as I saw your father reel and fall from a pistol-shot, the enemy were swept into eternity by a gallant charge of our own men. When the ring of muskets, the crash of steel, and the tread of charging legions had rolled beyond, I threw off the dead bodies that covered me, and crawling to your father, stanched his gushing wounds. He revived after what seemed an interminable age, and wrapped in each other's arms, as the night came down, we whispered, as we thought, our dying confessions. There, as the boom of the sullen cannon reverberated along the valley and shrieking shells went careering above us in the pall-black night, painting the leaden canopy of the lowering heavens with fantastic lightnings, I learned the depth and strength of one man's heart; learned how your father, through love for his younger

brother, had concealed his love for the same girl who had blighted my life, desponding in secret until a relenting fate stretched us together upon that bloody field. . . . We were rescued about daylight, and, contrary to all expectations, survived our desperate wounds. Eighteen months from the day we departed we arrived unannounced at home, and discovering all the family were spending the night with the Pattons, in order to be on hand to witness the nuptials of my twin brother and Cora, early the following morning we rode thither ourselves. What I suffered while traversing the old, familiar scenes, and entering the home of her whom I loved better than life or salvation, is impossible to delineate; and it was only the presence of your father that enabled me to bear the trying ordeal. We met the prospective bride and groom, only at the table that night; and though I thought it was a wan, hopeless-looking bride, no suspicion of the horrible truth disturbed my mind until, standing over her dead body the following morning, I read the lines that vindicated her innocence, eternally damned my brother, and lighted a hell in my bosom that has raged with unabated fury to this hour. Oh, Stanley, Stanley, may God preserve you from ever standing by the cold corpse of the one who is your

all in life, and realizing, as you think of your blasted and desolate future, that a brother's hand wrought the awful ruin ! It is surprising to me now that I did not become a raving maniac upon the spot, and slay the shameless devil that robbed her of life and spread for me a hopeless future ; but the Huntingdons are made of stern stuff. I calmly listened to the black traitor's remorseful confessions of the bold plotting which sundered Cora and me forever. I then left him with an undying curse, settled my business, and turned my back upon a spot which had grown unbearably loathsome to my mind."

After a few moments of silence he handed Stanley a paper, yellow with age, and dashing the tears from his eyes, Stanley read the following :

" **MY DEAR GUY**,—I thank God for bringing you home when he did, for had not the sight of your face hurried the inevitable I would probably have lingered as your brother's wife a few months ere sinking to rest. But now, oh, blessed thought ! unsullied by another's touch, I can wait for you upon some happier shore. Blame me not for loving you too fondly when your heart is no longer mine. I have much to say ; but my heart is broken, and the last life-drops are ebbing away. Meet me, oh !

meet me in that better land. I will watch over you until you come. Farewell. Do not think——”

The old man rose and paced the room with trembling limbs, while Stanley read those simple, touching, incomplete lines. Then, leaning against the mantel, he continued, in husky tones, “They found her prostrate before the desk with the pen still clutched between her fingers; and though it is sweet to think her last thought was of me, it is inexpressibly sad that death would not allow her time to pour out her full heart to my widowed soul. And could I force myself to believe there is a hereafter, that her angel form awaits me upon some other shore, how light would be the burden laid upon me! But, alas, I have pondered the matter deeply, have gone step by step through the lapse of ages, and the despairing conviction has been forced upon my unwilling mind that when the grave closed upon her fair and sinless form I bade her an eternal farewell.

“Enough of that,” he exclaimed, throwing back his leonine head. “I left home with such a settled hate against mankind, that had there been such a personage as the devil he would certainly have claimed me as his kinsman. At first, though my whole nature was changed and distorted, a shadowy

remnant of my early superstition was left to me, and I endeavored to win surcease of sorrow by laying the soothing unction to my soul that beyond the grave all would be well ; but as, like the fabled Hebrew wanderer, I passed from clime to clime, delving in the stored wisdom of every land, exploring the heart of every nation, looking abroad either in the New or the Old World, and beholding the earth swarming with a race busily damning their worthless souls, I very soon concluded they had no souls to damn, and have settled peaceably down until called upon to bear a prominent part in the 'Diet of Worms.'

"As you know, the less we care about fortune the more assiduously does she shower her favors upon us. I first found gold in Australia, and, jeering at my own good fortune, I discovered diamonds in Africa, then struck more gold in Mexico. Thus, having accumulated a vast fortune, with no means of dissipating it, I began experimenting in human nature ; and, ha ! ha ! if there were such a gentleman as the devil, and he were one-fifth as shrewd as depicted, he would send up a few thousand emissaries, loaded with gold, and by this means toll every man, woman, and child into sheol ; for, barring religion, gold can hurry my besotted race

hellward faster than any instrument I have yet discovered.

“Until ten years ago I employed my time in acquiring wisdom and assisting the worthy and innocent of womankind ; but, as every saint infallibly turned sinner on my hands, I became thoroughly disgusted, and retired to this seclusion, where I have since lived in beatific peace, only disturbed occasionally by having to kick some pushing, inquisitive American across my threshold.”

Moving impatiently from the mantel, the old man turned to Stanley, and continued: “Twelve years ago I rescued Ryene from a pack of beggarly kindred, who were practising on her life in order to reach her fortune. She has proven to be a sweet, loving child, and the affection I bear her compels me to forego my pleasant seclusion ; but as my impatient nature cannot bear, for any length of time, the society of those it abhors, I wish to marry her to some—what the world would call—noble youth, and thus be free once more to find my grave in my own peculiar manner. She possesses a half-million dollars of her own, to which I will add one million on her wedding morning. This, you see, coupled with her youth and beauty, makes rather a tempting dish. Will you indulge?”

Stanley roused up with a start at this abrupt question, and said, "It is a dish fit for the gods, indeed, but there are several reasons that places it beyond my reach."

The old man scowled at Stanley a few moments in silence, then said, "Remember, young man, I am unaccustomed to being thwarted and model your bearing accordingly. I love Ryene as if she were my daughter, and since meeting you the desire has grown upon me to see you her husband; so think well before refusing this offer."

"Uncle, you remember how you completed my history last night. You spoke truer than you imagined, so let that be your answer."

"Come, young man," the other said, placing his hand on Stanley's shoulder, "you cannot imagine all that your refusal involves. Ryene during the past ten years has become inexpressibly dear to me. Her presence is necessary to my happiness, and did I marry her to some sordid worldling I would lose her forever, for I could never endure his presence here. Now you are quiet, sensible, and the son of the only man in all the world that I do not hate; so save me the loss of my child by becoming one of my family. You are poor, proud, and finely educated; I am lonely and need your society; Ryene

is wealthy, pretty, and needs a husband ; so take her to your arms and supply all our needs. This house is stored with books, with servants and unlimited wealth, all at your command ; so settle here until the grave closes upon me, then follow any path your ambition chooses. Remember that you are eminently fitted to fill the highest positions in life, and do not lightly cast aside this last opportunity of building a proud name."

Stanley stood as if charmed while his uncle's low, winning tones filled his ears ; but shaking off the spell as the other ceased speaking, he replied, slowly,—

"Two weeks ago I would have accepted this flattering offer with philosophical equanimity, but it comes too late. My past has been all error, and I am steeped to the lips in guilt ; but a true and noble woman has usurped the devil in my bosom, and by the grace of God she shall reign there forever. My youth was guided by blind passion, my manhood, until this hour, by metaphysical sophistry ; but the love which irradiates my soul at this moment discovers to me the devil's woof ; so marvel not that I prefer a life of toil beneath the light of redemption, which, like Aurora's rosy fingers, gilds my future, to a life of wealth and

influence coupled with the mire and misery of all that I have escaped. I am but mortal, and your offer is fascinating in the extreme, I own ; so tempt me not, but rather aid me in being true to myself, to my love, and to my God. Uncle, I am more hopeful than you ; where life offers me nothing here, all *will* be well beyond the grave,—

So claim my life, and thou wilt quickly see
The Spartan in my bosom,—lay me low,
But while my heart's the universe to me,
Oh ! ask me not its raptures to forego.
'Twould matter not, 'twould matter not, I know,
If this poor life would end the sacrifice ;
But as the far eternal years shall flow,
If I should lose the sunlight of her eyes,
A desert dark and drear would be yon beaming skies."

The old man's face softened during this reply ; but turning away after Stanley ceased speaking, he paced slowly to and fro for a few minutes, while every feature grew black and rigid from the fierce passion surging through his bosom. Pausing at last, he said, in harsh, metallic tones,—

"I have heard it said that blood is thicker than water, but for those like myself, whose veins pulse with the liquid flow of hell's hottest flames, it proves a delusion. You are my brother's son. The sight

of your poverty-stricken state, coupled with the courtesies your father laid upon me, very nearly resurrected the humanity which lies buried beneath the mountains of my wrongs ; but your decision has chanted the final requiem above the uneasy ghost. I offered you a young wife, unlimited wealth, and an uncle's love ; but, as you see fit to scorn my offer, go, warm yourself upon the cold shoulders of your employers, and live by the fruit you have plucked."

Stanley's eyes wandered to the picture of Cora Patton hanging upon the wall, and a bitter taunt rose to his lips ; but his indomitable pride welling up suppressed the sneer, and turning to his uncle, he said, haughtily,—

“ If my memory serves me right your last speech is as superfluous as it is contemptible ; for I am unable to recollect any endeavor on my part to extract sustenance from your very generous fountain of the milk of human kindness. If your ghost of humanity slumbers beneath the Himalaya of your wrongs until I stoop to draw it forth, it will remain there until God's everlasting throne crumbles to dust beneath Him. I was not aware that you rested under obligations to my father until you noisily informed me of the fact, and even then expected

nothing more at your hands than the courtesy of a kinsman and a gentleman. You choose to withhold that because I respectfully declined the wife and unlimited wealth which you voluntarily placed at my disposal ; so that divorces the only claim that binds us, and we will now separate at your earliest convenience.”

“So be it!” the old man responded, turning to the window with a harsh, grating laugh. “‘The cock *has* crown, and light *begins* to clothe each *Californian* hill.’ Will you retire for a few hours’ rest, or shall I order the carriage now?”

“The carriage, by all means.”

CHAPTER XX.

PARTAKING slightly of the repast which his uncle ordered, Stanley then donned his overcoat and descended the steps to the carriage drawn up in waiting. As he was about to enter the vehicle, his uncle came forward and placed an envelope in his hands.

“What is this?” Stanley asked.

“A check on the National Bank for five thousand dollars.”

“What shall I do with it?”

“Draw the money and use it.”

“I was not aware of the fact that you were indebted to me.”

“I am, however.”

“By what means?”

“Well, you patiently listened to a confidential legend last night, which I would dislike exceedingly to have divulged; and this is what attorneys would specify as hush-money; so use it, and when the secret begins to gnaw your vitals, notify me of the fact, and I will remit further checks.”

The hot blood leaped to Stanley’s cheeks at this nonchalant insult; but instantly controlling himself, he tossed the envelope at his uncle’s feet, and silently entered the carriage.

“Wait, young sir,” the old man said, coming to the carriage door. “Let there be peace and unity between us, and receive this check as a token of good will.”

“Uncle,” Stanley exclaimed, in quivering tones, “you have sufficiently provoked me for one inter-

view, and if you are not entirely lost to all sense of shame and decency leave my sight."

The old man stepped back and ordered the driver to start, and while watching the carriage whirl down the avenue a grim smile flitted across his face as he muttered,—

"His father over again! But having been deceived so often, I will make sure in this instance. So, so! Six weeks' steadfastness will remove the embargo. She is a noble creature, and loves the very ground he treads. I fear the millennium is at hand, ha!"

Stanley was so utterly lonely and heartsick that he felt himself unequal to the ordeal of mingling, just then, with his brother workmen, and of meeting Raines's jovial face; so, instead of returning to San Francisco, he purchased a ticket for Gilroy. Arriving there, he procured a horse, and crossing the valley, ascended the mountains east of Soap Lake. As the sun was dipping behind the Coast Range of hills he arrived at his destination. This was a rude mountain cottage, amply furnished with everything necessary to camp-hunters, owned by an old man whose outlying acres stretched for miles on either hand, and whose countless herds roamed at will throughout the wide boundaries of this un-

peopled district. The name of this old hermit is known throughout the State* from his peculiar generosity. He lives alone in a solitary hut situated at the base of a beetling cliff, and though his friends are legion, not one has ever succeeded in crossing the threshold of his humble home ; but just above, in an elbow of the ridge, he maintains a free tavern for all who choose to claim his inexhaustible hospitality ; that is, provided they are content to wait upon themselves. This tavern is a rude cottage of four rooms, surrounded by orchards and vineyards, and supplied with a bountiful larder. Beds, tables, chairs, dishes, guns, and ammunition-pouches *ad infinitum* fill the rooms, all without money and without price. The peculiar and generous life of the old hermit should teach its own lesson ; but if, perchance, any religious enthusiast is exercised about his spiritual welfare, know he is a devout Methodist, an able theologian, and a quiet, genial companion. As my mind pictures thy form as I last saw thee, O guileless recluse, my heart cries, “God be with thee !” Though no gilded church echoes thy orisons, the mountain breezes bear them on unpolluted wings to thy listening Maker ; and fear not that He who watches the sparrow’s fall will overlook thee in

* Fact.

that vast and silent solitude. Thou kneelst upon an altar still more divinely consecrated, for has He not proclaimed the majestic and everlasting hills to be His awful footstool ?

Stanley groomed his horse, then lighting a fire in the stove, placed the teakettle thereon ; then, taking down a shotgun, he crossed the orchard, and fired into a large covey of unsuspecting quail. Securing the victims of his carnivorous passion, he returned to the house, where the characteristic meal of a helpless bachelor (spread in cosmopolitan array, and mingled in unconventional confusion) was soon smoking upon the table. There was tea, ham and eggs (!), quail *off* toast, fried Irish potatoes, raw tomatoes, flour hoecake, honey, and a basket of grapes. Finishing this substantial meal, he left the dishes to their fate, or to some accommodating fairy, and drew a chair out upon the porch, where, with innumerable cigars, he watched the mist roll up from the distant valley, and listened to the night-winds murmuring their complaints to the silent hills. O Solitude, thou Medusa to the guilty, thou comforter of desponding virtue ! from thy vast and shadowy bosom the stricken spirit draws ambrosial sustenance.

The past, with its hopes, its fears, its joys, and its sorrows, rolled forever away as Stanley sat with

bowed head in the darkness ; and, though his soul quivered with rebellious clamorings as it relinquished the last and fondest dream and turned hopelessly towards the unillumined future, the brave though humble petition that welled up long centuries ago from the garden of Gethsemane re-echoed along those Californian hills, crowning his complete surrender with quiet fortitude : "If it be possible, O my Father, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Ah, who has ever known Him to refuse that humble plea ? And when the east became flushed with morning he felt that another dawn looked upon another life,—one less complete perhaps than his soul had wished, but one bereft of bitterness, strengthened, purified, and based upon the seal of that lonely covenant.

Days flew into weeks, and weeks rolled away, still Stanley lingered on the spot which had grown inexpressibly dear to him. He felt safe, for the busy, tempting world invaded not this realm with its contagious fevers. But after the lapse of five weeks a party of huntsmen visited the cottage, and hanging up his gun, he bade farewell to his favorite haunts, returned the books of the old hermit, and departed for San Francisco.

Arriving in the city late in the afternoon, he found his room occupied by strangers, and, to his unbounded astonishment, learned that Raines was a two-weeks-old Benedict; learned that he had purchased a house on H—— Street, and had taken his bride, his own and Stanley's effects thither.

The beaming face of the bonny Jean greeted his entrance; and as he began offering his elaborate congratulations Raines heard his voice, and bounding into the hall, clasped Stanley to his bosom with such affectionate arms that ribs stood in imminent danger of collapsing.

“It’s Duke, by all that’s grand and glorious! Where the George Washington have you been? Ain’t she a darling? Twist my neck if she mustn’t kiss you. Come, come, Jeaney, he made the match, show your gratitude. There, that looks more like a Christian. But supper’s gettin’ cold,—come!”

There was very little sleep for them that night, I warrant you, for there was much to relate on each side. Stanley was convulsed with laughter during Raines’s description of his swift courtship, interlarding, as he did, the narration with innumerable fervid ejaculations at his blissful condition. But, amusing as the conversation was, it was almost pathetic to watch the great honest fellow’s full soul

peeping from his eyes as he watched the trim little figure of his wife bustling about the table.

“My God, Duke!” he cried, almost plaintively, “how can I contain all my happiness? And just think, old boy, I owe it all to you; for had you not taken me in hand last year, I would not have saved up the money I did; and, besides, I was such a simple ostrich, I don’t believe I would have thought of marrying had you not reminded me that such things ought to be did. But come, let’s look at the house.”

While the happy trio march up-stairs and down-stairs, we will follow them and take an inventory. First, as I have intimated before, it was a pretty little two-story building with wide Swiss cornice, and bay-windows jutting out from the side and front. It was painted a sea-green, with oaken-stained shutters, and was sitting back from the street, behind a greensward and forest park, twenty feet square. The furniture, though cheap, was new and tastefully selected, and those small, dainty rooms, with their maroon-colored carpeting and gracefully-draped curtains, presented a prettier and more home-like picture than many a more ambitious home.

Raines, like some pompous lord chamberlain, conducted the party from room to room, ushering

them in, and, falling back, he would hugely enjoy the effect it produced.

It is needless to say that Stanley enjoyed their simple, unaffected pride in their modest little home, and filled their cup of happiness to overflowing by his genuine admiration of everything he saw; but when, with many sly looks, they conducted him into a perfect little gem of a room, and he discovered it was the one set apart for himself, by seeing his own belongings ranged around, he could scarcely suppress the rising tears. As he silently grasped Raines's hand, that great overgrown fellow made a horribly wry face, swallowing some troublesome lump in his throat, and, patting Stanley on the shoulder, drew Jean out of the room.

An hour later, as Stanley sat smoking in the bay-window, Raines re-entered and said, "By the way, Duke, here is a letter that an outlandish-looking Mexican left here for you ten days ago."

"Thank you, Raines," Stanley said, taking the letter. Then placing his hand upon the other's shoulder, he continued: "Loud protestations of thanks and pleasure, old boy, are useless between you and me. But, let me say, I thought it was impossible for me to feel as happy as you and your wife have made me to-night. I feel at home for

the first time since losing my own; and, as it is unlikely that I shall ever claim another, depend upon my standing godfather as the exigencies require during——”

“Avast there!” Raines cried, rapturously squeezing Stanley’s arm. “Don’t smother me with thoughts of additional bliss. But, Duke, tell me something more of yourself. Why did you leave that job? The old colonel told Jim, who went out to complete it, that you were an excellent workman, and seemed to be puzzled at your French-leave; so what got wrong?”

“There are some things that are best left unspoken,” Stanley said, sadly, “so ask me about anything but that.”

“Well, well, old fellow, just as you like. I could, however, make a pretty shrewd guess, for there was a certain somebody asked Jim for your address.”

They talked until far into the night, and when Raines descended to his room Stanley turned to the letter. He scanned the bold chirography and puzzled over it a while before breaking the seal. “Let’s see what the old satyr has to say,” he muttered, with lowering brows, as he discovered his uncle’s name.

“My dear Stanley,” the letter began, “I think you must be the very devil, for, like mother Eve, I have had no rest since you invaded my paradise. My dear boy, I cannot bear the idea of Lewis Huntingdon’s son and my own nephew figuring as a common workman; so forget what has passed between us and return to me. I have been cultivating Irene’s society since you left, and find in her a noble spirit; and, if you love her half as fondly as you profess, disarm that indomitable pride of yours, and, backed by my wealth, go win her for a bride, or I swear by the gods of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob I will lay siege to her myself. That noble soul shall *never pass out of the family*, so look to it. By the way, that young Hamilton has been sneaking around here ever since you left, and I believe he has about persuaded Ryene that he is the very man she needs; so you see that sweeps away the bone of contention. He will take my child away to his city home, and then my loneliness will cry out after you; so come, my dear boy, and share my home. I am your unfortunate and affectionate uncle,

“G. R. HUNTINGDON.”

As Stanley read these lines, Irene’s sweet face rose before his eyes, and his pulses thrilled at the

glorious possibilities the tempting offer placed within his reach ; but when he thought of being subjected to the whims and caprices of the fiery and blasphemous spirit of that embittered old man, his self-respect answered nay ; and taking up his pen, he wrote,—

“ MY DEAR UNCLE,—I arrived here to-night and found your letter awaiting me. It is doubly hard for me to refuse your generous offer, as I believe it will shadow another life besides my own ; but, as you ought to know, it is best that you and I should live apart. You understand my meaning. Though it is impossible for me to accede to your wishes, I am glad you extended the offer, for your kind letter obliterates the bitterness implanted by your parting words. Hoping God will strike the scales from your eyes so that you may see His shining mercies, I am, with best wishes for your welfare, your nephew,

“ STANLEY HUNTINGDON.”

CHAPTER XXI.

So Stanley engages again in carpentry ; but, patient reader, leave him and Raines trimming up bay-windows around those magnificent buildings, and come with me along Market Street. Ah, here we are at this restaurant. Enter and peep into the ladies' department. What elegantly-dressed lady is that impatiently fingering those luscious grapes ? " You don't know ? " Why, I am shocked at you ! That is Irene Ellswaith. " What is she doing there ? " How do I know. Wait and see. Watch that messenger-boy making towards her. Hear him.

" Miss, that other man has married, and they are living at No. — H— Street. He and Mr. Huntingdon are at work, but his wife is at home."

" Thank you," she says, slipping a coin in his hand. " Now call a carriage and I will be through with you."

She leaves the restaurant, enters the carriage, and is driven to Raines's home, where the simple Jean, answering the bell, is " knocked all of a heap" at

sight of the elegant costume. "Costume?" Yes, costume! apparel, silks, satins, furs, and furbelows. Some one asks, "What's in a name?" but I ask, "What's in a face?" and echo answers, "What?" so, if you imagine I am wrong, test the matter yourself. Array your elegant figure in seedy robes, place a battered hat above your solemn and intellectual mug, and hang me up by the thumbs if one stranger discovers your superiority. My dear sir, miss, or madam, strangers frequently discover virtue in rags, and by some subtle magnetism detect nobility of purpose in a suspicious attitude,—but, unfortunately, it is confined to books. This, however, is not introducing Irene into Raines's home. Did you ask why she was alone in a public restaurant, patrolling the streets minus a duenna, and entering a strange house uninvited? "Yes." Are you an American? "Yes." Were you ever in love? "Yes." Then why do you ask such foolish questions? I am surprised at you. Why did I, a timid youth, brave the dangers of darkness and get my toes frostbitten hanging about Sally's window? What nerved me to dare Apollo's thunderbolts while murdering metre in my attempts to tell the world about her bewitching curls and saucy black eyes? What was it (while suffering with the sweet unself-

ish passion) that imbued me with a desire to scalp Monsieur Byron for informing me that, with the ladies, “Mammon wins his way where seraphs might despair”? What decided me to bequeath to the world a Miltonian epic in which I meant to dance all over the aforesaid gentleman’s misanthropical absurdities, and revenge the wrongs of those guileless angels? Alas! ere I could prove how easily the American eagle could overcrow the British lion, Oberon poisoned my Titania’s eyelids with the cursed herb, and the spreading pinions of my careering muse were singed and blasted by the equatorial sighs with which she pursued that rich old satyr, Jenkins of Jenkinsville. *Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis.* *Verbum sat sapienti.*

Be patient, dear reader, I will introduce those two ladies in five minutes. With the ubiquity of an author, I chanced to be sitting in Irene’s boudoir the evening before this chapter opens; and as I sat admiring her matchless beauty, while my mind overwhelmed Stanley with such classic apothegms as ass, dolt, etc., because of his stubbornly-idiotic treatment of this peerless creature, I heard a faint sigh, and, drawing nearer, I caught these faintly-murmured words:

“Ah, well, it may be wrong, it may be un-

maidenly, but he will never know, and if he discovers it I can die." Ah, meek-eyed despair, how ably dost thou force the "antique Roman" into a timid bosom! "I can see this Raines, of whom he spoke so affectionately, and devise some scheme by which I can assist him without exposing my hand. If I fail in this, his inordinate pride will weigh him down forever. Oh, cruel, cruel! why didst thou ever cross my path? I can escape from my friends to-morrow, and have the whole day to myself for consummating this half-formed plan. It is wrong, oh! I know it's wrong, even dangerous to my fair name; but he trusts this man Raines, and what should hinder me? Enough, it shall be done."

The reader can gather from these ambiguous sentences that this queenly woman meditated some act from which her proud soul recoiled; but love, ah! that relentless master, guided her into paths repugnant to every feeling of her modest spirit.

As Jean opened the door, Irene stepped forward and said, "Do I address Mrs. Raines?"

"Yes, miss."

"I would like to speak with you a few minutes, if you are at leisure."

"This way, miss," Jean answered, leading her into the cosey little parlor.

"I can trust that honest face," Irene thought, as Jean blushingly offered to take her wraps; and sitting down, they entered into an earnest conversation of an hour's duration, the end of which discovered Jean on her knees at Irene's feet, as she looked lovingly up into the dark, glorious eyes.

"Do you think it can be done?" Irene asked, smoothing back the locks from her companion's brow.

"Yes, miss, my husband can manage it."

"Well, then, you unfold it to him, and let me know his decision to-morrow. Tell him all I ask, for myself, is absolute secrecy; that he can use my purse as if it were his own in furthering this plan; and that he will be abundantly remunerated for his trouble. I will have the writings ready for you when you come; and remember, above all things, if Mr. Huntingdon suspects my hand he will overthrow the whole plan; so be cautious.

"What pretty rooms you have!" she continued, rising to take her leave. "How long have you been married?"

"Just four weeks yesterday," Jean answered, blushing. "Would you like to look through the house?"

"Yes," Irene answered, smiling at the artless simplicity. And, tripping on ahead, the happy

Jean conducted the young heiress over the house, while she told how her husband and father had paid for all the furniture, and only owed one thousand dollars on the house; how he could soon settle that with his four dollars a day for wages and Stanley's twenty-five dollars a month for board.

"It is only a few weeks now until Christmas," Irene said, after listening to the sage calculations of the thrifty little housewife, "and I will aid you in giving your husband a pleasant surprise on that day."

"How so?" Jean asked.

"If you will give me the name of the man who holds the notes against your husband I will have them bought up, so you can slip them under his plate Christmas morning."

"Are you in earnest?" the little wife cried, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes."

"How good of you! How happy one must be when they are able to do as they like!" Jean answered, simply.

"I would gladly exchange places with you, my dear child, if—if—" A sigh stifled the remainder of the sentence; and as the sympathetic Jean kissed her hand, she drew her into another room.

The moment Irene saw the elegant dressing-case, the jaunty smoking-cap, and the richly-bound volumes stacked upon the table, she knew this was Stanley's room ; and as she stood with the soft color playing through her rounded cheek, Jean said,—

“ He must have been very wealthy at one time, for everything belonging to him is of the finest. I keep his clothes in order and go through all his trunks, and you cannot imagine all the rich, pretty things they contain. Has he ever told you his history ?”

Receiving no answer to this question, Jean turned and saw Irene standing with dreamy eyes before a cabinet-sized picture of Stanley which stood upon the table. And, with a mischievous smile playing about her lips, she withdrew to a window.

Irene had never seen Stanley except when his face was animated, either lighted up with pleasure or darkened with passion ; but here every feature was in repose, and as she noted the lines of suffering plainly traced upon his grandly-intellectual face, a sharp pain trembled through her gentle bosom. Moving nearer, to gain a better view, another likeness caught her eye. “ Can it be, can it be ?” she whispered, looking from the fresh, youthful face, with a mischievous light dancing in the dark-gray

eyes, to the stern but still handsomer counterpart. "Ah! my proud, peerless king, what chalices of poison has not thy passionate waywardness pressed to thy once smiling lips!" Listlessly opening a gold-clasped album that lay before the pictures, she almost held her breath as two fair young faces smiled up at her from the pages. One was a rare and lovely face, with large, soft, dreamy blue eyes; and after gazing long into the pure, innocent, trusting orbs that seemed to be pleading for her love, Irene read the simple word *Blondine*, traced beneath, and turned to the other. This was a bright, piquant face, with roguish brown eyes, raying out a saucy light from beneath dark, curling lashes. The tender smile which sprang unbidden to Irene's lips to greet the pretty pouting child died away as her eye caught the terse pathetic words *sit tibi terra levis* inscribed beneath. "God grant it!" she murmured, turning again to Stanley's picture; but the next moment she was startled from her reverie by a sharp cry ringing through the room. "What is it?" she asked, hurrying across to the window, where, with trembling hands, Jean was endeavoring to raise the sash.

The voice reminded Jean of Irene's presence, and turning she held her back, as she exclaimed, "Miss

Ellswaith, be calm, be firm. It is Mr. Huntingdon, and—they are bringing him home."

With a faint cry, Irene sprang past her to the window, then sank sick with fear upon trembling knees, as she saw a large crowd collected before the house, and four stalwart mechanics bearing Stanley's apparently lifeless form into the yard.

"Oh, my God! make me strong, make me strong!" she cried, starting to her feet, and the next moment, assisted by the excited Jean, she was throwing back the coverlids, drawing aside the chairs, and preparing the room for Stanley's reception.

In that moment of supreme agony Irene cared not how others might interpret her presence in his room; and standing with clasped hands, she watched them silently enter and gently place his unconscious form upon the bed. No cry escaped her as she looked upon his white, set face and bloody hair; for it was not the time to yield the mastery to her feelings; and, pressing through the crowd, which gave way in surprise, she began applying the remedies that were at hand. She recognized Raines, even in that busy moment, by the lively description which Stanley had given of him, and her heart warmed towards the big-hearted fellow while witnessing his almost ludicrous grief.

“I warned him, my God ! I told him to be more careful. Doctor, don’t stop. Oh, Duke, Duke, my poor boy, why didn’t you mind me ? Doctor, don’t stop ; save him. He’s the truest-hearted lad that ever lived.”

“There is plenty of hope, my good man,” the physician said, kindly. “Turn these men out of the room. They can do no good, and he needs an abundance of fresh air just now.”

“Come, boys, you hear the doctor. God bless you for helping me. I won’t forget it. If we could spare Jeaney here I would get you some dinner. That’s good fellows.”

After the doctor did everything in his power and had taken his leave, promising to return in a couple of hours, Irene touched Raines on the arm and asked, “How did Mr. Huntingdon receive his hurt?”

“He fell from the building,” Raines answered, turning and seeing Irene for the first time. “You see, miss,” he continued, looking at her in surprise, “he frequently gets to thinking of other things while working on the building, and I have to caution him about stepping without noticing where he is placing his foot. To-day I sent him above, telling him when he started to keep his mind about

him; but before he had been up there an hour, I saw him draw out a nail and step backward off the scaffold. He is active and would have caught on his feet, but he struck a brace and fell head first on a pile of lumber. Oh, miss, it was horrible,—horrible! May you never witness such an accident! What did the doctor say? And why did he leave so soon?" he exclaimed, seeming to notice the physician's absence for the first time.

"He did all he could for the present," Irene answered, "and returned to his office for some instruments that he will need in dressing the contusions on Mr. Huntingdon's head."

"Does he think there is any danger?" Raines asked, anxiously.

"Not unless there are internal injuries," Irene responded. "He thinks Mr. Huntingdon will regain consciousness inside of two hours, and then he can judge the extent of his injuries."

"It is terrible," Raines said, feeling of Stanley's pulse. "Poor lad, if he were to pass away in this condition, I would never know where to find his friends."

"Has he never told you of his past?" Irene asked, in surprise.

"Never," Raines answered. "Though he is

always pleasant, courteous, and obliging, he is strangely silent about himself. I know he is a gentleman, and a Mississippian ; that is enough. But, I suppose, if anything happens, I could discover his friends' whereabouts by his letters and papers. Are you not a friend of his ?"

" Yes," Irene answered, blushing ; " I am Colonel Ellswaith's niece. Mr. Raines, when he begins to exhibit signs of returning consciousness, I must leave, as I do not wish him to know I have been here ; for——"

" I understood you to say he was your friend," Raines interrupted, looking at her in surprise.

" So you did," Irene answered, smiling at the honest fellow's generous simplicity ; " but there are imperative reasons that induce me to take this course. Your wife will explain my presence here ; and from having heard Mr. Huntingdon speak so nobly of you, I place this implicit confidence in you. I will expect you to draw freely on my purse to supply his present needs, to conceal from him all knowledge of my having been here, and to keep me thoroughly informed of his welfare."

Raines looked at her a moment in puzzled silence ; then slowly shaking his head, replied, " Well, well, you ladies and gentlemen are guided by codes

beyond my ken ; but I suppose there is more in this than appears on the surface. As to accepting money for him, please excuse an ignorant fellow's stubbornness. Duke has plenty of means for his present needs, and when that is exhausted my own are at his disposal."

"I honor the motives that prompt this refusal," Irene answered, gently ; "but you will see the matter in a different light after talking with your wife."

Irene had been sitting smoothing the damp hair from Stanley's brow ; and feeling a slight quiver run through his frame, she turned and saw the tide of life was mantling in his cheeks. She drew aside from his range of vision as, with a faint moan, he stirred and slowly opened his eyes.

After looking dazedly at Raines a moment, he felt of the bed and murmured, "Where am I ? What has happened ?"

"You are at home, Dukey, in your own bed. Don't you remember falling ?"

"Ah, yes," he answered, with a slight whimsical smile. "I was in a great hurry to reach the ground."

"It will save time, hereafter, to use the ladder," Raines answered, bending over him with a glad laugh. "How do you feel, Dukey ?"

A faint moan was Raines's answer, as Stanley attempted to turn himself in bed; but after lying a few moments with closed eyes, he looked at Raines again and said,—

“Hasn't some one been here, Raines?”

“Lor', yes, Dukey,” Raines replied. “A whole crowd. Who did you wish to see?”

“I don't know,” Stanley replied, weakly; then, after a further silence, he carried his hand to his brow and said, “Raines, do you believe spirits can return to earth?”

“I hardly know, Dukey. Why do you ask?”

“I thought a radiant angel stood by me, here, and called back my wandering spirit,” Stanley replied, slowly. “I tell you, old boy, I've been a long ways from here; I have seen a brighter world than this; would to God I could have remained!”

“We are not able to spare you yet,” Raines answered, with a catch in his voice, as he noticed Irene's trembling limbs. “Why will people persist in murdering themselves with stubbornness,” he mused, as he watched her terrible struggle for composure. But, obeying the imploring gesture, he drew Stanley's attention to give her the opportunity to steal from the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

I FEAR my heroine has lost caste with a multitude of my sentimental readers, who doubtless wished for a tragic scene and loving *denouement*; but ere you condemn her unconditionally, remember those royal natures, though holding during such supreme moments their feelings in abeyance, suffer in silence an agony that is undreamed of in the philosophy of fainting, sentimental darlings. Also, remember how Stanley had rudely and persistently ignored her flags of truce and shy ambassadors, and ask yourself could she have acted otherwise with dignity. But had you followed her to the lonely seclusion of her chamber, and watched the hopeless desolation that swept the light from her dusky eyes as she paced the length of her room through the long, dark hours of that night, your heart would have gone out in pitying tenderness for the queenly, suffering woman. Had she believed Stanley's love was his own, or that it was not entirely and irrevocably hers, she could have laid

her own aside and bravely faced—as many another noble woman has—the pitiful remnant of pleasure that life yet held in reserve. But, ah! to know their souls were forever wedded, that their very pulses beat in unison, and that nothing but his mistaken and overweening pride held them asunder, was like gazing up through the blue ether at the glorious worlds bending above, and knowing that nothing but the angel of death can unseal their beauties to her enraptured eyes.

There is a something so holy in the unselfish love of a true-hearted woman that, while witnessing one lavishing the wealth of her virgin heart upon man's redeeming and God's most cherished altar, I feel as I imagine the Jewish law-giver felt when, in the desert's solitude, he heard that awful voice bid him cast his shoes from off his feet.

As the newly-disembodied spirit poises itself a moment, and casts a lingering glance along its backward path ere turning its awed gaze towards the mysterious aureola beaming beyond the dark valley of shadows, so the mind, facing a blighting sacrifice, lovingly reviews each past scene before wandering ahead with prophetic steps to meet the hopelessly desolate future. And happy is the man or woman who, feeling that life is shorn of its expected dowry,

can rise above the rebellious blindness and fix their gaze upon their portion beyond the grave.

Thus did Irene, through the lagging hours of that seemingly endless night, review the past few weeks of her life, lingering over each word, look, and tone that had unsealed the fountains of her love, only to sweep the brightness from her life, ere taking up the disconnected thread that spun wearily on to eternity. She tantalized her soul with no vain hopes; for, though realizing the foolish weakness of the unyielding pride that prompted Stanley to shadow both their lives rather than, by rising from his low position to her high estate, call forth the world's favorite animadversions, she understood his rebellious nature so thoroughly, that she knew they were divided as completely as if the Pacific's dark billows rolled above her grave. It was hard, inexpressibly hard, and dawn began to illumine the east before she had hushed her nature's discontented murmurings and unwillingly resigned herself to the inevitable.

Knowing that Raines would send tidings of Stanley's condition immediately the world began to stir, Irene threw open the blinds, and, seating herself by the window, patiently waited until she saw the messenger coming up the walk. Then slipping down,

without disturbing the family, she received the following note at the door :

“ *MISS ELLSWAITH*,—*He* passed the night feverishly, restlessly, frequently starting up and crying out in his sleep. This morning finds him burning with fever and wandering in his mind. The doctor seems troubled over the symptoms.

“ Respectfully, **JEAN.**”

Irene returned slowly to her room, filled with painful misgivings by the unexpected news this note contained ; but, descending at the breakfast hour, she cheerfully bore her part in the gayeties of the day, while through the liveliest conversations rang the low moans of fevered lips, and a handsome, hotly-flushed face, with wild, glittering eyes, haunted her through all her daily rounds. The longest days, however, have an ending, and at nightfall, among other letters, she discovered this laconic note :

“ *MISS ELLSWAITH*,—*Fever* still rising. *Syptoms* all for the worst. Doesn’t know any one.

“ Respectfully, **JEAN.**”

After a night of broken sleep, Irene received the following letter :

“MISS ELLSWAITH,—Begin to prepare yourself for the worst. The doctor says Mr. Huntingdon cannot possibly live twenty-four hours longer in his present condition. The fever and his powerful exertion during his wild struggles are rapidly exhausting him. Oh, Miss Irene ! I fear Mr. Huntingdon has been a terribly wicked man. It is appalling to listen to his fearful blasphemy during his wild ravings. He is continually calling on some one to forgive him for what he did. One moment he will be smiling and uttering the softest and most seductive words, the next he will break into the harshest laughter imaginable, and seem to exult over some ruin he has wrought. Oh, it is horrible ! horrible ! You cannot conceive how horrible it is. As I sat last night listening at him mingle prayers with curses, defiance with entreaties, and scoffing at everything we hold to be honorable and sacred, I thought, what if he passed away in this condition ! and prayed as I never prayed before. If you ever see my husband, please do not let him know I have written you this, for I know it would seriously displease him. I told him last night I feared Mr.

Huntingdon had been a wonderfully wicked man, and, frowning at me a moment, he said, 'If Dukey is a villain, it's a pity everybody don't turn villains.'

"God bless the true-hearted fellow!" Irene murmured, her eyes filling with tears, as she laid down the cruelly uncalled-for letter and started to her feet. Walking rapidly up and down the richly-carpeted room a few minutes to subdue her agitation, she then continued the letter:

"There are three names almost always on his lips. One is Lena, one Blondine, and the other is your own. And it is pitiful to hear him cry out, 'I have sinned, Blondine, I have sinned! Ah, take those fond, accusing eyes from out my heart!' This morning, just before day, he seemed to be falling into a stupor; but, rousing up, he cried, 'Irene, my peerless, my beautiful Irene! Ah, God! I have lost thee, but thine eyes have saved me!' Then he rambled on in a foreign language that I could not understand.

"My husband wishes to communicate with Mr. Huntingdon's friends, but is unable to do so because he dislikes, unless the worst comes to the worst, to break open a small ivory box in which Mr. Huntingdon keeps his papers. He told me to ask you to

come out if possible; if not, to send him word what you think would be right in this emergency.

“Very respectfully, JEAN.”

Irene felt that it would be impossible to mingle in gay company with the contents of that letter chilling her bosom, and pleading indisposition, she remained in her room until the afternoon. Then, ordering a carriage, she was driven rapidly to Raines's home.

The physician was just leaving Stanley's room as Irene entered; but, on seeing her, he turned back with her, and said,—

“Mr. Huntingdon is rapidly sinking. Flesh and blood cannot endure the sirocco that is raging in his veins twelve hours longer.”

Stanley was tossing restlessly upon the bed, muttering disconnected sentences; but his strength seemed to be too far spent to allow the wild outbursts than Jean had described; and as Irene saw the hot blood pulsing beneath his almost transparent skin, and noted the fearful ravages which the swift tide had already made, a thrill of despair shot through her bosom.

“Do you know me, Stanley?” she asked, bending gently over him.

As the low, musical tones caught his ear, the restless eyes became fixed upon her face, as, with a slow, glad smile, he exclaimed,—

“I am ready. Thank God! a radiant angel is to be my guide.”

She placed her cool fingers upon his throbbing brow, and as she did so a quiver ran through him, while his eager eyes searched her face more intently.

“Listen, Stanley,” she said, bending nearer. “It is Irene, come to stay with you while you sleep. No one else shall approach you; so you can be quiet now and gain a much-needed rest.”

He made no response to this, but continued watching her face as she smoothed the damp locks from his brow; and after a few minutes spent thus, she saw the fiery gleam fading from his eyes as, with the murmured words, “Irene—rest,” upon his lips, the long lashes swept lower until he drifted into a heavy slumber.

Irene heard, but she heeded not Raines’s smoothed thanksgiving; for it seemed that her very soul was following the sleeper’s on that shadowy, perilous journey from which she feared it would never return; and forgetting her friends would be uneasy over her prolonged absence, she sat through the

long hours of that night caressing Stanley's hands, cooling his brow, and rousing him at intervals to administer the medicine prescribed.

Leaving this lovely woman valiantly battling for Stanley's life, we will turn our eyes upon a scene where all is consternation and confusion. Irene's family and friends supposed she was out making a call, or shopping; but when darkness closed in without her return their uneasiness grew apace. The tea hour passing without tidings from her, they became so alarmed that messengers were despatched in all possible directions, while her name trembled along every wire in the city. About one o'clock at night, when almost in despair, Colonel Ellswaith heard from the carriage-driver who took a lady of that description to No. —, H—— Street; and accompanied by his wife, who beneath all her society polish bore a warm heart towards her husband's niece, he was soon *en route* to Raines's home.

As the carriage drew up before Raines's house, a tall, powerfully-built man, who resembled some dark old Norse king, left the small front parlor in which he had been restlessly pacing, and, opening the hall door, admitted the colonel and his wife.

“This is Colonel Ellswaith and lady,” he said, as

they looked at him in surprise; "and I presume you are uneasy about your niece."

"We are, Mr. Alvarado," the colonel replied, hastily. "Is she here? Is she safe?"

"She is here, and she is safe," the other responded; "but for the present she cannot be disturbed."

"And may I ask why?" the colonel said, a suspicion of foul play crossing his mind.

"Because," the other responded, deliberately, "she has just succeeded in snatching Stanley Huntingdon from the jaws of immediate death, and must be allowed to complete the work so auspiciously begun."

"But, sir," the colonel's wife interrupted, sharply, her fears of Madam Grundy's tongue returning with the knowledge of Irene's safety, "you hardly seem to realize what you are asking. We have come to take our niece home. Leave her in this questionable portion of the city, and by that low-born laborer's bedside, indeed!"

"Allow me, madam," Stanley's uncle answered, with an impressive bow, "to inform you of the joyous fact that since you last beheld him Mr. Huntingdon's blood has turned cerulean blue."

"What do you mean?" the lady asked, haughtily.

“Pardon me,” the other answered, his lips curling with a mocking sneer; “perhaps I can command the idea within range of your comprehension by informing you that henceforth Mr. Huntingdon will only wield golden tools,—that is, he has become wealthy; so, discovering in this carpenter my nephew and heir, and knowing I am able to buy your husband’s wealth ten times over, will probably reconcile you to the idea of having your niece by the bedside of this quondam gentleman of the unwashed.”

“How can that be?” the colonel asked, looking at him in astonishment. “I understood you were a Spaniard.”

“If it is the first time you ever understood what was false,” Stanley’s uncle replied, “I will disclaim all relationship to this young man.”

“How long since you knew this?”

“Since I first laid eyes upon him. That knowledge was the key that placed the intricacies of my amiable retreat at your mercy. But do not let me keep you standing all night. Here are chairs and sofas at your disposal, or you will find beds in the adjoining room should you wish to retire.”

“But, my dear sir, I wish to speak with my niece.”

“Your niece, my dear sir, is, in society parlance, not at home this evening,” the other replied, seeming to enjoy their annoyance. “And, although I dislike to appear stubborn, I am compelled to ignore all proffered bribes and deny you admittance to her presence; as, at this moment, she is preventing a noble lad from sinking into a premature grave. Sir, your niece is a royal creature; make yourself worthy of her by gracefully accepting the situation. I am aware that fear of Dame Grundy’s tongue is troubling you and your excellent lady; but remember that the matrimonial twist can unjoint that mischievous instrument, and either retire for the night, sit here until daylight, or return home, whichever pleases your fancy best; for your niece you cannot see until God makes known his decision concerning my nephew’s present destiny.”

“I only ask to be allowed to speak a dozen words to my niece,” the colonel said, suppressing his rising wrath. “Surely her absence from his side during that short length of time would not affect your nephew’s welfare.”

“Sir, in the inscrutable bosom of Providence lodges the refusal of your humble request. My nephew’s life, according to the physician’s dictum,

depends at present upon undisturbed repose; and as he sleeps with your niece's hand clasped in his, and begins to rave the moment she leaves his side, it is dangerous for her to leave him at this juncture; so, realizing that it is not my fault, visit your displeasure elsewhere than upon my head. Allow me to remind you again of the bed that is at your disposal, and to rid you of my presence."

He left the room, closing the door softly behind him, and, leaning against the baluster of the stairway, remained motionless until daylight began to stream through the transoms over the hall doors; then turning, he noiselessly ascended the stairs. Reaching the door of Stanley's room, which was standing partly ajar, he saw the physician leaning against the window-sill, Raines sitting with bowed head at the foot of the bed, and Irene seated upon the bed by Stanley's side, closely watching his slumbers. And screening himself so as not to be discovered by the occupants of the room, he saw Stanley move restlessly, and then, slowly opening his eyes, gaze in puzzled wonder at Irene; saw the look of unimaginable rapture that irradiated his face as he weakly extended his arms, and heard the murmured words of joy and love as their lips met in long, lingering kisses; and hardened as he

was by years of sin and hate, his stern lips quivered with emotion, while tears extinguished the dark gleam of his baleful eyes. He saw the physician hurry forward, and, feeling of Stanley's pulse, swiftly administer a soothing potion; saw Stanley smile faintly at Raines, who was blubbering for very joy; saw him throw his arm about Irene's neck, draw her loving and dewy lips to his, press her soft cheek against his own, and then drift again into dreamland.

Calling the two men from the room, he learned from the physician that the crisis had passed, and that Stanley was safe; then drawing Raines down the stairs, he placed a roll of bank-notes in his hand, and said,—

“As Stanley is safe now, I will return home and stay there until he is strong enough to receive me. Pay all his expenses with that money, and keep the fact of my having been here from his knowledge. Colonel Ellswaith and wife are in the parlor waiting for their niece. Go and tell her to come down. I will return inside of ten days.”

Squeezing the honest fellow's brawny hand, he then entered the parlor, and greeting the weary couple sitting there, informed them that Irene would be down shortly; requesting them, at the

same time, to withhold from her all knowledge of Stanley's good fortune until he returned. Then bowing himself out, he entered a carriage in waiting, and was driven rapidly to the depot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EIGHT days have elapsed ; and, although Stanley's wounds have healed and his fever has subsided, he has gained strength but slowly. This seems to be a very ungrateful return for the unremitting kindness of those surrounding him. But as he lies back among the pillows, looking worn and restless, it is easily seen that disease of the mind, not of the body, is sapping his slowly-returning vigor.

Determined to rise, he had overruled the physician's objections, and, assisted by Raines, had crossed to the window, where he now reclines in a large, comfortable arm-chair, while his eyes turn impatiently up and down the street.

Presently a carriage rolls up to the gate ; and, with a fresh bouquet in her hand, Irene alights and

enters the house. He hears her light step upon the stairs, and turns eagerly as Jean opens his door to admit her. She quickly crosses the room to his side, and placing the flowers in his lap, bends—turn your face aside, reader—and gives him his regular morning and afternoon prescription.

“How brave we look this morning!” she said, with a bright smile, as Stanley, thanking her for the flowers, drew her to a seat by him.

Stanley did not answer her, but playing nervously with her slender fingers, he said,—

“Irene, you have persisted in tying my tongue from the fear that exertion or excitement would cause a relapse; but, believe me, this silent struggle, with thoughts that sicken me, is far more dangerous than unburdening my mind to you. Regardless of consequences, I must explain the feelings that oppress me; and if I exhibit any unmanliness, I trust you will attribute it to my nervous and weakened state.

“I have loved you since the evening I looked into your eyes, while standing by that window in your uncle’s parlor; and the knowledge that Stanley Huntingdon, the carpenter, could never wed with Irene Ellswaith, the heiress, prompted me to crush my love in its incipiency. But discovering it to be

beyond my strength, and fearing I would betray my weakness, decided me, as you have probably suspicioned, to avoid your too magnetic presence. I will not linger over how I loved and what I suffered, for a new vocabulary would have to be formed ere I could adequately express the tantalizing misery of those days. I was strong then, and in the solitude of the mountains I thanked God for the love that purified my life, and determined to live, so that I would be worthy to meet you where wealth is valueless and rank is unrecognized. But here," he cried, breaking into the plaintive querulousness of an invalid, "since discovering how fully you reciprocate my love, and since feeling those sweet lips pressed to mine, I am unequal to the task of following the path to which my honor points."

He paused a moment to collect his thoughts, and before he could resume, Irene said, gently,—

"Stanley, I know all that is in your mind,—all that you wish to urge; but ere you exhaust yourself further let me relate a story.

"Once upon a time there lived, in France, a beautiful young princess, who had the misfortune to be caught in a burning building. And, after every attempt at rescue had failed, a brave soldier, at the imminent risk of his life, rushed through the blazing

rooms, and, wrapping a scarf about her head, bore her safe to the arms of her parents. Now, in those days, it was death for a common mortal to touch the sacred person of royalty ; and her amiable parents had sufficient gratitude to order this brave soldier—covered as he was with the burns received while saving their daughter—to be cast into prison, to await his execution."

Irene smiled as Stanley looked up with puzzled interest, and continued : " I see you are wondering what the princess thought of all this. She acted as any true-hearted woman should, by working and praying until she procured his release, and had him munificently rewarded. Now, Stanley," she continued, with blushing cheeks, " you recognize the wicked injustice of the laws that condemned that noble soldier ; you would rush into a burning building to rescue me, if you knew it was only to perish with me in the flames ; you would have condemned that soldier had he, remembering the laws at the last moment, refused to touch her too sacred person and left her to her fate ; and yet, because of a few unwritten laws still more unjust ; because of the world's biting tongue, you turn coward and wish to leave me—to let me——"

" 'Perish amid the flames my own eyes have

kindled,' " Stanley interrupted, with a soft laugh, as he drew her queenly form into his arms. "I will rescue you, my sweet princess, from your imminent peril," he continued, gently kissing the rosy lips, "even though my life pays for my audacity." Then, dropping his laughing tone, he said, sadly, "I am unworthy the generous love and confidence you place in me; but, God being my helper, I will endeavor to prevent you from ever regretting this step. It shames me to remember what a pitiful return I can make for all that you are lavishing upon me; and truth compels me to acknowledge, did not your uncle and aunt, contrary to all precedent, seem satisfied with your deplorably sorry choice, I would hesitate some time before claiming this unparalleled sacrifice at your hands. I owe you not only my life, but also my very manhood; for springing at one bound from a boy to a devil, a devil I remained until your sweet face redeemed me,—shamed the foul fiend from my nature, and led me, clothed and in my right mind, to the feet of my Maker."

Then, in low, rapid tones, he graphically portrayed the bitter mistakes and sins of his past; and though he felt her tremble in his arms as he showed the dark passages through which he had trod, he

steadily pursued the narration, tearing aside each veil, and holding up the dark deeds with a relentless and unsparing hand.

“This, you see,” he said, in conclusion, “is the battered wreck on which your pure young love is embarked ; and, believe me, Irene, had not this accident occurred, the strength which your love had given me would have saved you from the shadow of my presence.”

“Stanley,” Irene said, raising her glorious eyes to his, “your life has been more sinful than I suspected, but let the past bury its dead. Love and the present are ours ; and if some day in the future you can fold your arms about me, and whisper in the language of that noble poet,—

‘ But now it has fallen from me :
It lies buried in the sea,’

I will be the happiest wife that ever claimed a husband. Some day, ah ! some day you will understand the love that is in my heart, will know how your lofty, daring intellect conquered my once haughty mind ; how your impetuous and rebellious spirit won the allegiance of my own, and how the very sins and sufferings of your past endear you to me.”

Words were useless then : soul spoke to soul during that fond embrace, and all fears, doubts, and misgivings were swept away by the silent tide of the sweet communion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN hour later, as Stanley lay upon the bed jesting with Raines, and Jean sat discussing momentous questions with Irene, a ring came at the door. Answering the bell, Raines returned in a few moments accompanied by a gentleman whom Stanley knew to be a lawyer.

After bowing to the other occupants of the room, the lawyer sat down by the bed, and addressing Stanley, said,—

“I fear, my dear sir, that I am the bearer of ill news.” And as Stanley made no reply, he continued: “It is my heavy duty to inform you that your uncle, Guy Huntingdon, is no more.”

“Dead!” Stanley cried, starting up in bed. “Impossible!”

“He was found sitting lifeless upon a sofa at

daybreak this morning," the other continued, with lawyer-like regularity.

"May God pity his unprepared soul!" Stanley exclaimed, thinking of the dark, sinister face he last saw. He completely forgot the lawyer's presence as his mind dwelt upon the splendid life that had so recklessly ignored its grand possibilities, and had at last, as he thought, been extinguished without a hope for the future; but the lawyer's smooth tones soon roused him from his reverie, as they said,—

"It seems that your uncle had a premonition of his approaching dissolution, for yesterday morning I received a hasty note urging me to come out to his house immediately. I obeyed the summons, and spent the afternoon of yesterday preparing his papers. He prevailed upon me to spend the night with him, and about twelve o'clock last night came to my room with this letter, which I promised to deliver into your hands."

Handing the letter to Stanley, the lawyer rose, and continued: "As I find you unwell, I suppose I will have to defer the reading of the will until you are able to come down."

"Is my presence necessary?" Stanley asked, dazedly.

"You are his kinsman," the lawyer answered,

simply. "This is my card. Telegraph when you are able to come. Good-day."

When the lawyer departed, Stanley gave the letter to Irene, and, drawing her chair to the bed, she broke the seal and read the following lines :

"' Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'

"MY DEAR STANLEY,—Thirty-six hours ago I hardly dreamed those words could find an echo in my bosom ; but at this moment, like a grand diapason, they swell through all my soul, filling me with peace and joy unutterable. Hearken to my story.

"Of late years it has been a custom of mine to spend a portion of each night in the room we occupied the evening I discovered myself to you,—the room which contains my pictures and treasures ; and while sitting as usual late last night before the picture of her who claimed the love of my youth, my mind began to dwell upon the harassing mysteries and horrible uncertainties of this life.

How long I thus sat I know not, roaming through fields of the past,

Thinking of the hopes of mortals and the dreams that never last ;

When it seemed that the room was filled with a soft and silvery light,

Which raised and drifted the shadows out into the darkness of night.

As the subdued aureola diffused its silvery beams throughout the room, I turned my head and saw my lost darling standing in all her radiant loveliness by the window. And as I sat ravished of all power of volition, gazing like one in a delightful trance, she turned her angel eyes upon me, and, gliding to my side, she pronounced my name as her hand softly caressed my cheek. The wild rush of rapturous feeling loosed my tongue, and with a glad cry I exclaimed, 'Cora, Cora, my loved one, it is true, God be praised!' She understood my meaning, and moving back with a smile of ineffable sweetness, she answered, 'It is, and I have remembered my promise. Prepare thyself, for after another night we will meet to part no more.' Raising her hands above my head in silent blessing, she then glided to the door, and, turning her sweet eyes upon me, pointed upwards, and vanished from my sight. Imagine, if possible, the unimaginable; futile is the attempt to describe the indescribable.

"The first thanksgiving that leaped from my heart was human and all unworthy. I gloried in the

thought of having lived uncontaminated by woman's touch, and being thus enabled to meet her as pure as her own virgin bosom. But, ah! as I realized the infinite compassion of Him who, pardoning my sinful and rebellious life, crowned its end with a glory inconceivable, my heart was awed into humbleness; and sinking upon my knees, I grovelled in thankfulness and contrition beneath the thickly-showering mercies, until my soul caught the whispered words, *It is well.*

“It is sweet to think, as I pen these words, her angel form, like a shooting-star, is hastening on eager pinions from its flowery home to bear my fainting soul to the footstool of a merciful Father; and the only shadow upon me is the thought that I have not time to proclaim in trumpet tones on the highway and from the house-tops His inexhaustible love and mercy for my blindly-groping brothers.

“Now, Stanley, my noble-hearted lad, Raines will tell you I was by your bedside during your fever; and knowing this, and knowing the spirit that prompts my confessions is staying its flight to eternity until they are uttered, will constrain you to believe me when I say my rude treatment of you was the mere trial of your sterling qualities. Had you agreed to turn from the love of Irene and

accept the wealth of my ward, I would have spurned you from me with contempt; but when you answered my ignoble offer with those loving, manful words, I rejoiced over the incorruptible spirit that I had discovered. You probably wonder why I drove you from me with such bitter taunts. I had been deceived by hundreds, who on the first trial seemed to be all that I could ask, and I determined to put a severe test upon you,—determined to arouse your wrath, make you believe me unworthy your respect, and then see if you would fawn upon me to receive Irene and wealth at my hands; but your courteous reply to my letter answered my expectations and proved the innate nobility of your spirit.

“I witnessed the tender passages between yourself and Irene the morning you woke in your right mind. May Heaven prosper your loves! I expected to have the pleasure of witnessing your nuptials, but it cannot be; yet she and I, standing together in peace and joy above, will look down upon your peace and love below.

“You will find my will sets one million dollars aside for Ryene’s marriage portion. She and Lawrence Hamilton will marry in three months from yesterday. The remaining property, this place, and

another in the southern part of the valley, with three million dollars in money, bonds, etc., goes to yourself.

“With many blessings for you and the peerless woman who claims your love, I am, my dear boy, your loving uncle,

“GUY HUNTINGDON.”

Silence succeeded the reading of this letter, until, rising from the bed, Stanley drew Irene into his arms, as he said,—

“I cannot grieve for the spirit which has joined its loved one where the ‘wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest;’ but, would to God I had known the grandeur of his soul ere the grave shut him from my sight! Uncle, I wronged you; but you see my bosom now.”

“Tell me his history, Stanley,” Irene said, hiding her dewy eyes in his bosom.

After Stanley, in simple, touching words, related the bitter deception that desolated his uncle’s life, Irene’s arms stole about his neck, as she murmured,—

“As I become more fully acquainted with your noble but wayward nature, and discover the chivalric race from which you sprung, I pray God to

make me wiser and more worthy the trust He placed in me when giving me your love."

"That reminds me," Stanley said, drawing her closer to him. "To-day has showered rich blessings upon me; but the richest is yet to come. When may I claim you altogether?"

"Whenever it is your wish," she answered.

"In that case, I fear you would be compelled to bid farewell to your prospective *trousseau*," he said, smiling, and kissing the tender lips. "But I will allow you thirty days in which to worry the milliners."

CHAPTER XXV.

"ALL aboard!" The bell strikes, and, my dear reader, you and I, standing upon the platform of an elegant Pullman sleeper, are whirled out of Oakland, and roll southward through the famous San Joaquin valley. Stop peeping in at that door, will you? and turn your eyes over the level sweep of this populous valley, and along the romantic scenery of those majestic hills. See, we are hurrying across the Mojave Desert, with tier on tier of hills to

the left, and range on range of sand mountains to the right. Ah ! here we are shrieking through tunnels, and shaking hands with the engineer around these horse-shoe gorges. Keep away from that door ! you shall not see them. Just like all mankind, you turn away from Mother Nature to watch the antics of her babes. Now we have made the loop, and rolling down into Fort Yuma, we leave the sleepy-looking Indians to bask their wealth of nakedness in the tropical sunshine, and hurry on across Arizonian deserts, with nothing but a few lonesome-looking cacti to disturb the monotony of the scene. "Change cars for Fort Worth," and leaving the adobe buildings of El Paso, we roll up through Texas and prairie-dog villages (or rather cities, if size governs nomenclature). Matters are becoming more interesting now, you see, for at every other town a cowboy or two, with his belt filled with pistols, his head with space, and his heart with liquorish bravado, swaggers into the car and bullies the unfortunate tenderfoot into an abject collapse. *Ecce homo !* Keep away from that door ! or I will throw you out into one of these Arkansas frog ranches. Here we are at the Father of Waters, looking across at the innumerable lights gleaming over the Bluff City. Hail to thee, Mem-

phis! mayest thou flourish like Jonah's gourd till the end of time! But we are not at our destination yet, although we have made the quickest trip on record. This is the depot. Stand aside there and let that couple pass. See how tenderly he assists her down the steps, and guides her through the crowd to a carriage. See the sweet, holy light lurking in the depths of her dark, beautiful eyes, as she turns them in thanks upon her noble-looking young husband. O love, thou radiant angel, why let one forlorn heart wander in the cold gray dawn of a loveless day? Why not enroll all human creation in the blushing ranks of thy interesting and unselfish votaries? When I desert thy standard, open thou the "gates of my grave!"

We are off again, whirling over the wide, rolling hills of Mississippi; passing sleepy stations, cotton-fields, creeks, bayous, and dark stretches of forest, until, with a shriek and a quiver, the car pauses at the neat little village of B—.

"My son, my dear son!" This cry rings out joyously, as a tall, white-haired old lady steps forward and folds a young man to her motherly bosom.

"I have brought you a daughter also, my dear mother. Will you not welcome her?"

“I would be an unnatural mother, indeed, if I refused to welcome one who nursed my boy back to life,” the old lady said, folding the beautiful bride in her arms.

Walking between her two children, the happy mother conducts them to an elegant residence on the outskirts of the small village, where a host of friends soon throng to welcome the returned wanderer and his lovely bride. It is a Southern welcome,—famous the wide world over,—warm as her genial clime, generous as her bountiful soil.

Three hours later the young couple, escaping from their friends, steal off through a shady, secluded lane that leads to a modest little church and parsonage.

“Irene,” the young man is saying, as they walk along, “I find myself a stranger in my own land, and the change is in myself alone. I have trod this very lane a hundred times in the past, yet, in looking on the once familiar scenes, it seems that I am gazing across the lapse of centuries. I left here poor, bitter, hopeless, and sinful; feeling as I imagine Cain felt when, receiving the mark upon his brow, he turned his steps, a vagabond and a fugitive throughout the earth. I return blessed with riches, blessed with a loved and loving wife,

and blessed with the hope that God has pardoned my numberless sins."

Thus Stanley communed with his beautiful bride, unfolding all his hopes, aspirations, and philanthropical schemes of the future, until they reached the parsonage. It was a pleasant afternoon, and as they glanced through the door, opened to receive the rays of the sinking sun, they saw a fair young mother bending over a cradle, smiling at the prattling child.

"Blondine!"

The voice rang softly through the room; and turning, the young mother caught her breath as she saw the well-known figure standing upon the threshold; but the next moment a rush of pleasure swept the pallor from her cheeks, and springing forward with his name upon her lips, she caught both his hands in hers; then looking earnestly into his eyes she read the history they bore, and murmured, "Thank God I see you thus!"

Irene could restrain her tears no longer, when she heard those sweet, unselfish words, and stepping forward with "Blondine, my sweet sister," upon her lips, she caught the young mother in her arms and kissed the pure, innocent lips. Irene was not usually of a demonstrative nature, but when she

looked down into the tender, trusting face pressed against her bosom, and remembered all that she had suffered in order to reclaim Stanley from his evil ways, every fibre in her queenly being thrilled with emotion, and, kissing the trembling lips again, she whispered,—

“I know all, my sweet sister, and, oh! the service of a lifetime cannot absolve the debt I owe you.”

A blush dyed Blondine’s cheeks at these words, and, raising her soft eyes, she looked intently at the matchless beauty of the other, as she said,—

“When I heard he was to be married I felt uneasy for his future, but since seeing you I am satisfied, for I now know he has found the one woman God intended for him.”

Irene turned and discovered that Stanley was not in the room. “Where is he?” she asked, looking at Blondine.

“I saw him going towards the cemetery,” Blondine answered.

While the two young wives play with Ollie, Blondine’s baby boy, we will follow Stanley’s steps to the cemetery, where Lena, his youthful love, rests beneath the green sod. He had passed and

repassed that spot hundreds of times in the old days, but, while her name was fraught with such bitter associations, he had persistently avoided its sight. Now, however, while standing by the lowly mound, reading the simple words chiselled on the marble slab, nothing but sorrow for the untimely fate of the merry-eyed child stirred his bosom. But as he stood leaning pensively against the headstone, his mind mirrored her sweet face turned towards him as the soft brown eyes dreamily watched him leave the boat, and a twinge something like those that had driven him to the border-land of ruin and death shot through his bosom. Dropping upon his knees and leaning his head against the cold stone, he was pouring out his soul in prayer when a strangled moan smote upon his ear; starting to his feet, he turned and saw a wild, haggard face, lit up with hollow, burning black eyes, peering at him across the iron railings.

“So,” the apparition said, moving aside and revealing the form of a young woman, “I find Stanley Huntingdon still true to his old love.”

“Who are you?” Stanley asked, moving towards her.

“Ha! ha! ha! how flattering to have old friends forget you!”

"Susy Clenny!" Stanley cried, looking at her more closely. "My God! is it possible?"

"Ay, it is possible," the other answered, bitterly. "My heart has eaten away my life above the grave at which you were kneeling."

"And did you love her so well?" Stanley asked, softly.

"Love her? ha! ha! I loved her so well that I buried her there, and the fangs of remorse are revenging her injuries."

"What do you mean?" Stanley asked, his heart sinking at the sinister words.

"I suppose you remember the letter that drove you from home?" she asked, recklessly.

"I do."

"It was a forgery, gotten up between Jasper Hewlitt and myself. That little chit loved no one but you, and the letter she received as coming from you killed her,—killed her and slew my peace of mind; but, oh, my God, I never dreamed it would kill her!" the unhappy woman wailed.

"Why did you do this?" Stanley asked, in low, tense tones.

"Jasper Hewlitt hated you and loved her; I hated her and—and—wished to separate you."

“Where is Hewlitt now?” Stanley asked, curtly, a steely glitter leaping to his eyes.

Turning and pointing to a fresh mound, Susy said, “He lies there, where I will be ere many weeks.”

“May your remorse be your winding-sheet!” Stanley said, harshly, as he turned away; but catching the hollow moan that followed him, his conscience smote him, and returning to the grovelling woman, he said, kindly,—

“Susy, you ruined that innocent child and blackened my life with sin, but may God forgive you freely as I do at this moment. It is useless to spend your moans by this grave. Go, cast yourself at the foot of the cross, and cling there until the angel of peace raises you up.”

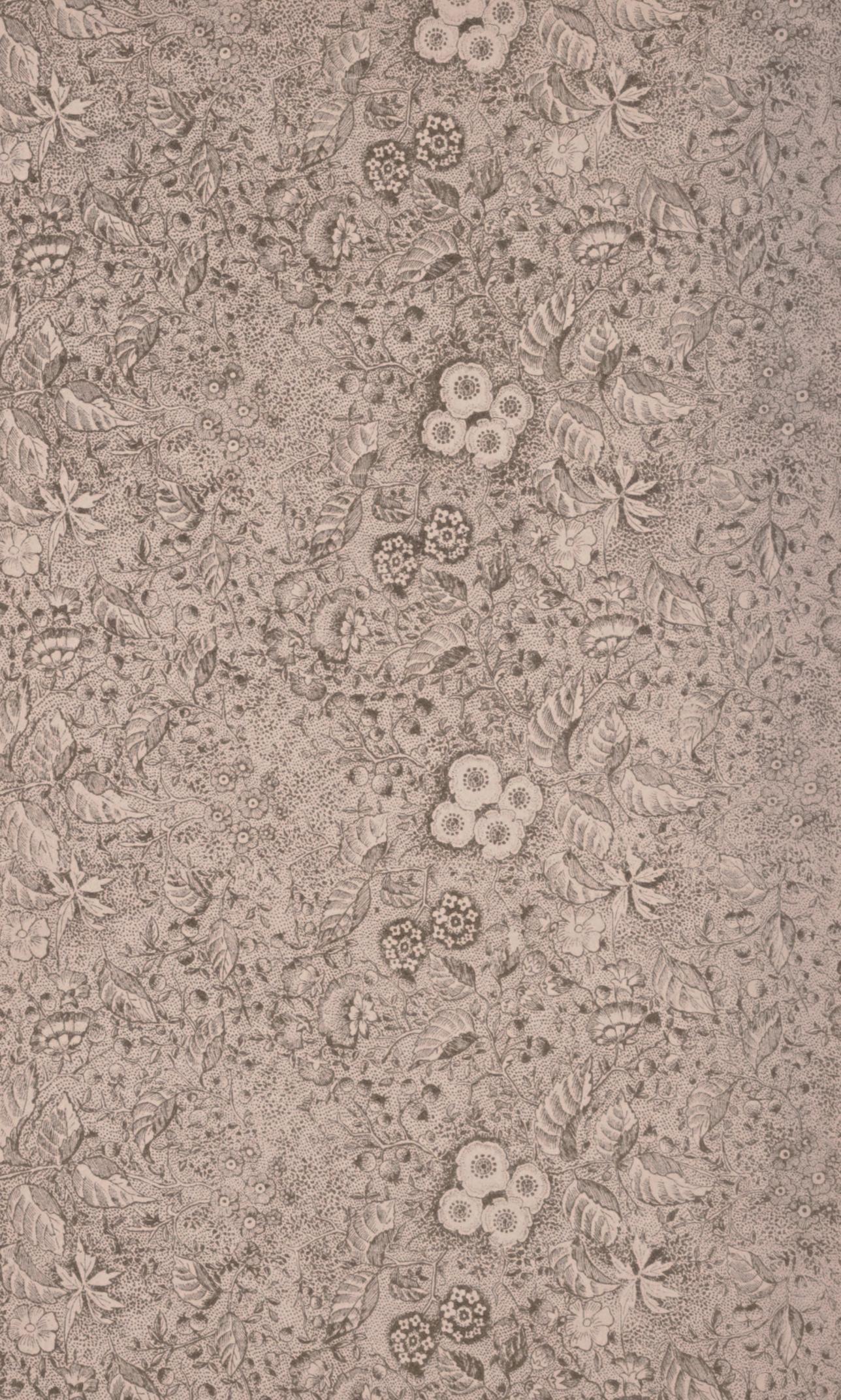
Leaving the stricken woman crouching in the path, Stanley walked slowly towards the parsonage. Irene had been watching for his appearance, and on seeing him leave the cemetery she came to meet him.

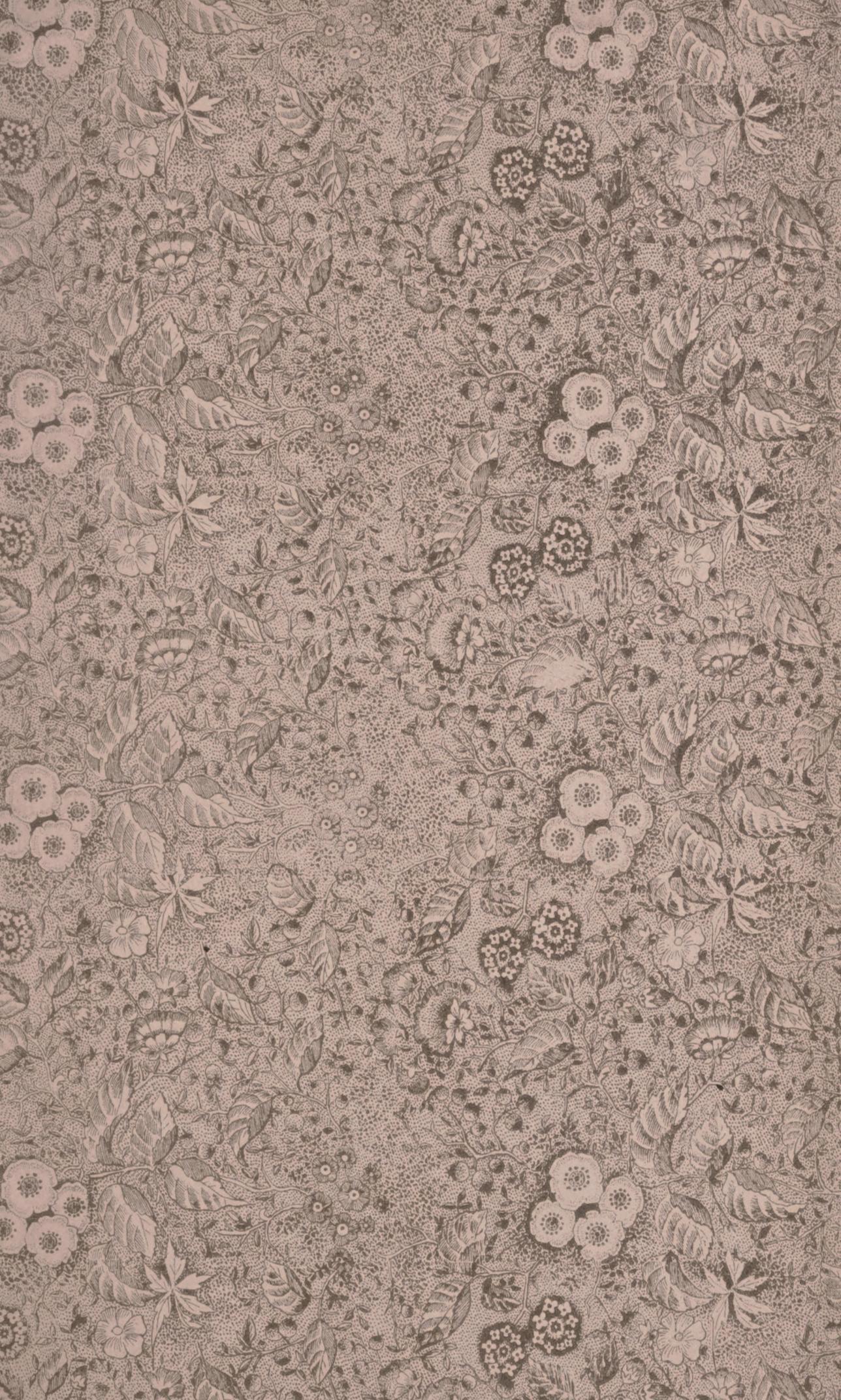
“What is it, Stanley?” she asked, gently, as she noted his pale face.

“I heard that child was true to me, and it has unnerved me,” he answered. Then dropping his arm about her rounded waist, he continued: “I very

nearly said, ‘By what subtle threads hang the human destiny, for a word, a look, or the stroke of a pen changes the current of a life;’ but in glancing back along the intricate path I have trod, I recognize the hand of God in each seeming accident that guided me to you, my true, my beautiful wife.”

THE END.





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